

# I Like America

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BY  
**GRANVILLE  
HICKS**

*A native sees his country as it is, and as it might be*



A NEW MODERN AGE BOOK



# I LIKE AMERICA

by

GRANVILLE HICKS

"THIS," says the author, "is a book about America. . . . It is merely a statement by a middle-class American, based on what he has seen in the course of an ordinary life and what he has read in intervals not devoted to the literary studies that are his professional concern."

Granville Hicks is the author of *The Great Tradition* and *John Reed, the Making of a Revolution*. He likes this America which he knows and in which his people have lived for generations. But he is very much interested in the people who he suspects "feel no positive affection" for their native land — "the underprivileged," who have little reason to like America, who "lack patriotism because they don't share in America's greatness." What Mr. Hicks would like to do is to convince these people — some eighty percent of the population of the United States — that "even if they haven't much of a stake in America as it is, they have a tremendous stake in America as it might be."

On their behalf he addresses himself to what he calls the "middle middle class" — the ten or twelve million people who are economically situated much as the author is. He hopes that they will hear what he has to say because he believes that "there is much that we could accomplish if we worked together."

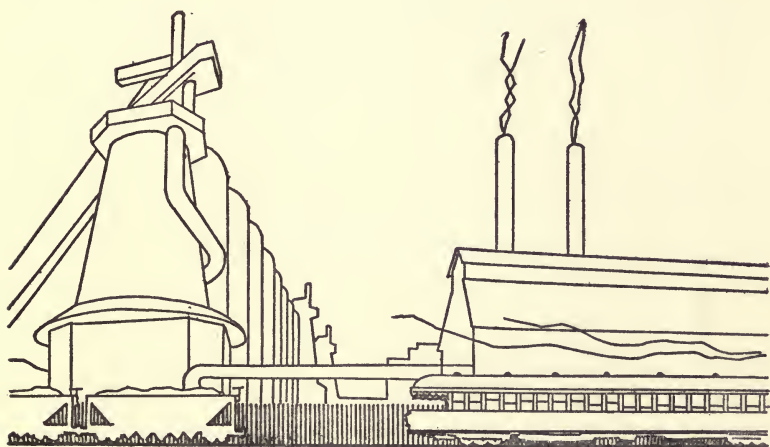
*by Granville Hicks:*

EIGHT WAYS OF LOOKING AT CHRISTIANITY  
THE GREAT TRADITION  
ONE OF US—THE STORY OF JOHN REED



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BY GRANVILLE HICKS



DECORATIONS BY RICHARD M. BENNETT

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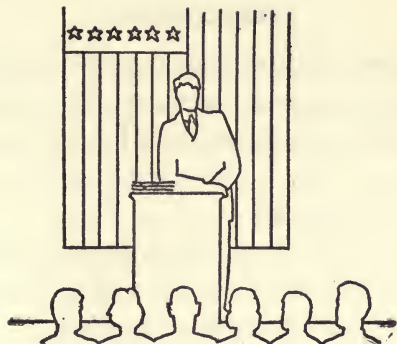
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**I LIKE AMERICA**





## Prologue: For a Certain Patriot

ONCE upon a time, after I had finished delivering a lecture, you got up and said, in effect at least, "If you don't like this country, why don't you go back where you came from?"

You may remember my reply. I said that, in the first place, I was born in America, and so were my ancestors for a good many generations. And, in the second place, I do like this country.

As a matter of fact, you and I have a great deal in common. We both come from New England stock. We went to the same college. We both are married and have families. We both live in houses that we own. We both have incomes roughly sufficient for our needs. Neither of us has traveled widely, but we are both reasonably sure that we would not care to live in any country but the United States.

We belong to the same class — what a sociologist friend of mine calls the middle middle class. This class constitutes rather less than ten percent of the American population, with more

than eighty percent, so far as incomes are concerned, below it, and less than ten percent above. And yet, though we belong to the same relatively small group, our ideas differ so much that, on the occasion to which I have referred, you insisted on regarding me as a foreigner.

What I want to do in this book is present my case to the middle middle class, to the group to which we both belong. As I conceive it, we are facing a jury of our peers — in the strictest sense of the word. You do not have to worry about the presentation of your case; it is stated daily in newspapers, magazines, radio speeches, sermons, and classroom lectures. It is the case for things as they are, and is dear to those who have easy access to the various means of influencing public opinion.

Mine is the case for change, and it is less often heard. It is stated by only a few newspapers and magazines, and these not widely circulated. It is given only a few minutes on the radio in contrast to the hours and hours of which your spokesmen avail themselves. It is presented by a mere handful of ministers and teachers, and these constantly suffer from the displeasure that you and your friends know how to make so effective.

That is why I find it necessary to address myself in a book to your class and mine. My thesis is not that I am as good an American as you; that is too modest a claim; I maintain that I am a better American. And I shall try to prove it to the jury of our peers.

This is a book about America. It is not a report on a special tour of investigation. It is not the outcome of scholarly researches. It is not even the impressions of an extensive traveler.



It is merely a statement by a middle-class American, based on what he has seen in the course of an ordinary life and what he has read in intervals not devoted to the literary studies that are his professional concern.

You spend a certain amount of time worrying about those persons who don't like America, and so do I. I am not interested, I must confess, in the rich Americans who live abroad, marry titles, and seek out the condescending company of European aristocrats. I am not interested in the artists and writers—not so numerous as they used to be—who flatter their own weaknesses by expressing contempt for their native land.]

But I am interested in the people who, without having a conscious dislike for America, feel no positive affection. These people are not necessarily, as you would like to believe, foreigners; they are quite as likely to be of old American stock. They are the underprivileged, and they lack patriotism because they don't share in America's greatness. They have little or no part in the America that you and I know and love.

You think you can make such persons like America by forcing them to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and take oaths of allegiance. Your method has proved singularly unsuccessful. What I want to do is convince them that, even if they haven't much of a stake in America as it is, they have a tremendous stake in America as it might be. I think they will become patriots if they understand my kind of patriotism.

My kind of patriotism, unlike yours, is, as I have said, the patriotism that believes in change. And I think it is more closely akin than yours to the patriotism of the men who fought in the American Revolution, of the abolitionists, of the

westward-moving pioneers. We have made some drastic changes in our history as a nation, and it seems to me truly American to be ready to make another great change if the need exists.

If the need exists. . . . That is, of course, the root of the whole matter. That is why, in the course of telling what I like, I shall have to speak also of what I don't like. It may even seem remarkable at times that my patriotism has survived, but I assure you again that it has. It persists because I am confident that the evils of which I speak can and will be remedied. I like America because I include in my view not only the past and the present but also the future.

In this mood I address myself to as many as will listen of the ten or twelve million Americans who are situated as you and I are. Even you, who were so quick to denounce me upon that other occasion, may change your mind if you will bear with me for a little while. I hope so, for there is much that we could accomplish if we worked together.



## I. Northeast Corner

THE PART of the United States that I know best and love best is that lying east of the Hudson River; that is to say, New England and a little strip of New York. I insist on that little strip both because I now live in it and because I would like to include New York City and the Hudson River itself in what may be called my private America. There is much else in America, of course, that I like, and I am not the kind of sectional patriot who thinks other regions inferior to his own. But I have spent my whole life in this particular area, and, if I didn't like it, I probably wouldn't think much of America.

In eastern New York, fifteen miles from the Hudson, about ten miles from the Massachusetts border and less than twenty from Vermont, is a little village that once was part of the great feudal Dutch manor of Rensselaerwyck. In this village, on the farm where I live, there is a graveyard whose stones bear the names of early settlers, men and women who came

here from Rhode Island and Massachusetts — “Mayflower” descendants, by the way, every one of them.

The village was the last part of the great manor to be settled, for it was the least accessible and the least fertile. But a time came when the good sites were all gone, and the pioneers, driving their ox teams down the valley of the Little Hoosick, turned west again at Petersburg and climbed the Grafton hills. They chose their farms as best they could, and signed their agreements with Stephen Van Rensselaer, promising to pay him and his heirs so many bushels of wheat a year in perpetuity. Then they went to work to clear the land, as the broad stone walls show.

For a hundred and twenty-five years the pioneers and their heirs got whatever living they could out of the intractable soil. Then the farm was sold for its timber, and most of the great oaks and maples and hemlocks were cut down. Shorn of its trees, except those near the house, it was put on the market again, and this time sold to a teacher for a summer home. For ten or twelve seasons he lived in the place, loved it, and tinkered with it, installing a rough-and-ready water system and a bathroom, building a porch, dividing the upper part into rooms. But at last he planned to retire and leave the vicinity and he sold it — to us. For a few years we used it, as he had, only in the summer, but three years ago, as I shall subsequently tell, I lost my job, and since then it has been our home.

Here begin and end such journeys of exploration as we make. Usually we go either south or east, and more often south, to the island of publishers, magazines, and literary teas. If I go alone, I go by train, and that in many ways is best,



for, from the train, one sees the Hudson all the way, and the trip is, according to a friend much more traveled than I, the most beautiful train-ride in the world.

Sometimes we drive. There is nothing very exciting about Route 9, but its steady speed takes us at last to the Bronx River Parkway, with its fine wide pavement, the laurel, bridal wreath, and coreopsis that have been naturalized along its borders, the easy sweep over rolling hills, the disciplined arches of the bridge over Croton Lake, the towering menace of the reservoir embankment. On Sundays the city reaches out and takes possession of the parkway, as well it might, but on other days the traveler scarcely knows the city is near until he plunges into it.



New York is part of the America we like. I never drive across one of the bridges into Manhattan or walk up the incline into the Grand Central Station without a little gooseflesh of excitement. Nothing can ever overcome my rural prejudice that it is not a fit place for human beings to live in,



but I like to be there. I like the height of the buildings, the complexity of the subways, even the blatancies of Times Square advertising. I like the crowds and the roar and the sense of urgency.

That is not all I like in New York. I like the theaters and the concert halls and the art galleries. It may be a pity, but the cultural life of America does center in New York. When I am there, I know what is happening, for better or worse, in American literature, art, drama, and music. And because it is the cultural capital, many of my friends live there, and that is another reason why I like it.

New York is exciting, and, as I have said, when we leave the farm, we usually go south, but our eyes go east every day, and so do our thoughts. The house looks toward the east, and so, born New Englanders all of us, do we.

We look to the east, to the mountains. Our Taconics. Two or three times a day some one of us calls the others to look. Even in the winter, when the clouds are over them, we speak of their invisibility. The colors of sunrise over our Taconics. The disc of the moon showing above them. Clusters of cloud over or upon them. Snow lying heavy or streaked along the tops. The steady change of color from day to day and hour to hour. And behind them Greylock of the Berkshires, whose beacon nightly reminds us that the mountains are there.

There are finer views of the Taconics than ours, and certainly there are grander mountains, but we know we have been fortunate, and we do not ask to change. We look toward them, and often we cross them. As we drop down our range of hills toward the valley of the Little Hoosick, we see all their beauty, and then in a minute we are climbing them.

The Taconic Trail is, I suppose, as modern engineering goes, an ordinary enough road, but that is all the more reason for marveling at it. Think of the generations of New Yorkers and New Englanders who, for one hundred and fifty years, skirted those mountains. Think of the railroad builders, laying their tracks in a great semicircle from Troy to Williamstown in order to follow the river valleys. And today's car, on today's road, goes up the mountains in high gear, so easily that most drivers do not pause, as we always do, to look back on the road, on the valley, on the narrow line of the Little Hoosick, on the farms and orchards and boulder-strewn pastures, on the hills with the yellow band that is our road, and on the horizon peaks of the Adirondacks.

Just below the crest of the mountain Massachusetts begins, and at the foot there is a fork in the road. Shall we turn right and wind into Pittsfield, or left and pass in the shadow of Williamstown's colonial college halls and North Adams' grimy factories? If we go left, we can drive from Williamstown to Bennington, and thence straight north through the center of Vermont, or we can climb the Mohawk Trail out of North Adams and head for Boston. If we go right, Pittsfield offers us the choice of the Berkshire Trail to Northampton and Worcester or the Jacob's Ladder route to Westfield and Springfield or the roads into the southern Berkshires and Connecticut.

All New England is before us as we pause on the eastern slope of the Taconic Trail, and it is hard to tell where it is pleasantest to go. Whatever way we choose has not only charm of its own but also the added charm of agreeable memories.

In the southern part of Maine there is the farm where my wife was born and spent her first thirteen years. The farmhouse has since burned, but she can tell us about the painted chamber, with the pictures on its walls of the houses and the people, the exotic fauna and flora, that, growing out of the imagination of some ancestor, became part of her childhood fantasies. She can show us the brook that was filled every August with cardinal flowers, the pasture where she and her brothers rode bareback on the farm horses, the site of the barn in which the whole family slept on hot summer nights.

Twenty miles away is a lake on whose shores we spent three summers. We could draw a map of it from memory, locating each of the four infinitesimal islands on which we ate picnic lunches and took sun baths. We could easily find the marsh where the heron used to come and hunt for frogs, or the big rock on which I was once marooned, or the spot on the trail to the Saco River where we camped one night, lying awake to watch the movement of the constellations and listen to the barking of a fox. We know just how long it takes to paddle across to the sandy beach, just how far a canoe can be taken up the inlet, from just what point one can, on very clear days, catch a glimpse of Mount Washington.

North from our lake — and the best way to go is, or used to be, on the Songo River steamer — is a town in which five or six generations of my ancestors are buried. Their neighbors went west and farther west, or took to the sea, but they stayed on their farms, and the town is still populated with third and fourth cousins whom I have never seen.

It was my grandfather who broke away and went to Boston, earning his living as a teamster. My father was born

in Boston, and so was my mother, though her roots are in Cape Cod; his in Maine. I was born in New Hampshire, but Boston was the center of my early life, just as New York is the center of my life today. Ten years of childhood and youth were spent in suburbs of Boston, and for seven years I lived across the Charles in Cambridge.

It would be hard to say what draws me, even now, to Boston. It is not, for the most part, a beautiful city, and certainly not an impressive one. But it was the first city I knew, and it gave me not only my first impression of size and of crowds but also my first understanding of human activities other than those practical ones that are devoted to keeping alive. Boston means to me my first moving picture, my first play, my first big parade, my first meal in a restaurant. It means the natural history rooms, the art museum, the opera, Symphony Hall, the public forums. If I am, as I suppose I am, what is called an intellectual, that is, a person specializing in things without which life can exist but without which there seems little reason for its existing, Boston is largely responsible.

Boston and Cambridge. To go back to Cambridge now and see the millions of bricks that, placed end to end, would doubtless stretch an astronomical distance but, arranged in various architectural patterns, make up Harvard's elaborate new houses, is for me a little depressing. But there has always been a great deal about Harvard that I do not care for. So much of it symbolizes what I do not like in America that it is hard for me to feel strong affection for it. I do feel gratitude, however, and I know that there is a Harvard that belongs to us and our America.

Everywhere I go in New England, I find something that



makes me glad to be a New Englander and an American. Just off the Berkshire Trail there is a brook with a fine fall and a lovely gorge. My wife and I discovered it by accident one day when we got lost on a hike, and we revisit it every time we are in the vicinity. We know every pool and ledge and connect with each some story of ours. Even when we have to drive by in a hurry, it is good to know the brook is there.

It is pleasant, driving through the onion fields between Northampton and Amherst, to look up at Mount Holyoke and think that I have walked along the range and might some day do it again. It is exciting, going up the Connecticut Valley, to remember that, if I want to, and I always do, I can stop at Hanover and see the Orozco murals.

Not far from Boston there is a town in which I lived as a boy. On my bicycle I covered every road in the neighborhood. Some of the roads are today automobile highways, on which no cyclist would be safe, but I suspect that others are unchanged, and that I could find my way to certain waterfalls as confidently as I did twenty-five years ago. Perhaps I could even reconstruct the dramas that I acted out as I rode along.

New England is full of lovely places. Near Mount Chocorua there is a house to which, ten years ago, friends took me when I was as nearly exhausted as I have ever been in my life, and from this house my daughter recently started out to climb her first mountain. In the Green Mountains there are a dozen streams beside which we have at one time or another stopped, impetuous streams that in floodtime pick up concrete bridges and throw them about. All over New England —

But I did not intend this to become a guidebook. All I am



trying to say is that it is a joy to live and to be able to travel in such country as this. I make no apologies for the way in which my affections are restricted. If I knew more of America as well as I know this part, I would find just as much to admire and rejoice in. But patriotism begins at home, and mine is firmly rooted in love of this country east of the Hudson.



## II. The Worlds

HERE I SIT, in my new study, trying to set down the thoughts that last night were hammering through my head. It is easier to talk about the study.

This is what the insurance companies call a story-and-a-half house. For over a hundred years there was only one finished room upstairs, all the rest of the space being unpartitioned and open to the roof. Here, our neighbor tells us, the children slept, their beds clustered around the chimney when it was cold, placed under the tiny windows when it was warm.

The professor from whom we bought the place made rooms upstairs, as I have said, but he was using the house only in the summer, and rough partitions of beaverboard were good enough. They were good enough for us, too, for many years, but we dreamt of something more permanent and more pleasing.

From the very beginning we knew this was my study, for

it was set apart from the rest of the house. My bookcases and my desk were brought up, and here I wrote the greater part of two books. It made a good study, but we saw that sooner or later I could and would have a better one.

But there were other things that had to be done first. Our first enterprise was the drilling of a new well, for the old one was inconveniently placed and sometimes went dry. That exhausted our funds for a while. Then we repapered and repainted the living room and one of the bedrooms, and gave the kitchen a new floor and new walls. The next summer we tried our hands at painting the outside of the house, and did over the upstairs hall.

By that time it was clear that we must have a fireplace. Once, of course, the whole house had been heated by fireplaces, and there had been a huge chimney. But fifty years ago the kitchen fire somehow escaped, burned the floor, scorched the great timbers, as one can still see, and threatened the whole house. The owner took out the fireplaces, tore down the chimney, and set up stoves. What he did was natural enough, but we always regretted it. And so, as soon as we felt we could, we had a fireplace and a new chimney. For nearly a month in the late fall the living room was an uninhabitable waste, but, before seriously cold weather, a fire was burning under the old mantelpiece as if it had always burned there.

The next time we cast up our accounts, it was with the new study in view. The keystone of the plan was a dormer window to be built on the south — to enlarge the room, and to give more light in winter and better air in summer. As usual, we called in our neighbor, who was born in this house and has taken a major part in our remaking of it. He tapped the big

beams, a foot square, measured here and there, and scratched his head. He guessed it could be done, but he wouldn't want to try it alone. Could he find someone to help him? He would see.

A few days later he said that he had left word with George's sister to have George come and see him. A week passed, and George had not appeared. I suggested that we might visit him, and our neighbor, with some surprise, said we might. We found him painting his Ford, a slight, quick-moving young fellow. He said he had a lot of jobs. One man had sent word that he wanted to build a barn; another had asked way back last winter if George would help him put in a bathroom.

I was ready to give up and look elsewhere, but our neighbor, hitherto apparently so indifferent to George's coming, set himself to win him over. It took a long time. They talked about painting cars, about the weather, about cows, about distant friends. Our neighbor explained, as if it were a special reason for George's consenting, that I was a writer and had to have a study. At last George asked how long it would take, and, on being told two days, agreed to come.

Though I had scarcely expected it, he came, and, after two days of hard work, the dormer was nearly finished. George presumably went to one or the other of his urgent customers — though I am not sure he didn't go back to painting the Ford — and our neighbor, with my father's help, completed the job. An English teacher from Harvard and an architect from New York, visitors on successive week ends, helped me paint it outside, while the neighbor went to work within. Patiently he put up a new ceiling, struggling always against the unevenness of beams and the inevitable catty-cornering of an old

house. He built a window seat and lined it with cedar, put up book shelves on two sides of the room, and sheathed the other walls with pine paneling. My wife painted the floor, the ceiling, the walls, the bookcases. And during all the weeks that the study was being created I borrowed a corner of my daughter's room and got on as well as I could with my work.

At last it was done, every inch painted, my desk moved back, the books in place on the shelves, the new rugs on the floor, new awnings and new curtains at the window. Even the chairs were repainted. I could move in and go to work. We could — and did — invite our friends to admire.

It has been a good study to work in, better in every way than the old, cooler in summer and warmer in winter, better arranged, and far more satisfactory to the eye. But best of all is the sense that it is our creation — our planning and to no small extent our work. And even what is not our work is our neighbor's, who did his share for money, of course, but who takes and will always take as much satisfaction in it as we.

That is, at least in outline, the story of the study. Of course our summer program of work didn't stop there. The first year we had the house we put on a roof of galvanized iron, and last summer, with the help of our guests, we repainted it. On one side of the house the paint had peeled — amateurs have to learn — and had to be burned off and replaced with two new coats, more permanent we trust. And meanwhile there was the garden to be tended, berries to be picked, the lawn to be mowed. Visitors came to talk or play croquet or go swimming.

The summer went by, and in the fall we suddenly decided on another important change. Kerosene lamps are mildly romantic, but they are not convenient. Ever since this became



our permanent home, we have wanted electricity, but the cost of getting it was exorbitant. I was flattered, of course, by the suggestion that I might make a "contribution" of several hundred dollars to a great utility company, but I felt there were other causes I should, if I had the money, prefer to support. Then my father became ill, and that, for a number of reasons, made electricity almost essential. Once more it was our neighbor who came to our aid. After many weeks of negotiations and disappointments, the papers were signed, and we waited for the line to be built.

We waited and waited, and hope sank as the frost went into the ground. Then suddenly huge trucks appeared on the road, bringing poles. More trucks came with squads of men. Holes were dug, and great huskies, with ropes and pikes, tossed the poles into place.

Again we waited, for weeks, until at last other trucks came, and the huskies tramped through the snow, stringing the wires. All our fixtures were ready, just as we had planned them for years. Our neighbor appeared from hour to hour to report progress. On the second day a truck brought the transformer to our pole, and it was installed. The wires were run to the house, and the meter put in place. The men went away again, and we waited.

It was just after sunset on a cold December day. We were so confident that my mother had not filled the lamps, and the house was growing dark. The men had been gone for a long time, and nothing had happened. Finally I got into the car and drove down to the state road. At the top of the hill a small truck was stopped, and I could see the big trucks down at the main line. A man by the big trucks made a signal, just visible

in the twilight, and the little truck started off. I turned around and followed, to find one man climbing the pole to the transformer and another standing by the meter-box. I went inside to report the good news, and just then the lights came on. That was a month ago, but they still seem a little miraculous.

One thinks about a house when one is in the process of shaping it to one's needs, especially if every change costs money that is hard to get and takes time that is not easy to find. One thinks about heat when oil and wood have to be provided well in advance against the possibility of snow storms and when the wood has to be split and carried into the house. One thinks about water when the supply is not unlimited, when there is a pump to be run every day, and when zero temperatures bring a threat of freezing. One thinks about the weather when cold or snow storms or prolonged drought or heavy rains can throw life into a turmoil.

Much that we once took for granted we can take for granted no longer. Do not think we regret this. We are glad to have our lives in our own hands. I spend nine-tenths of my time reading and writing, but my life cannot be made up wholly of books, nor would I be content to have the empty spaces stuffed with poor substitutes for living, with the drinking and gossiping and false sociability of certain literary circles. I want my life built around and into this place of ours. It is not merely that I think a certain amount of physical labor good for me; it is not merely that I like to have some common ground of experience with men and women who are not intellectuals; it gives meaning, unless I am completely mistaken, to my intellectual life.



What I am trying to say is that the life I am describing is, for me, a good way of life. I do not call it "the" good way, even for me; certainly I would not prescribe it for others. But I do think that it is healthy and sound.

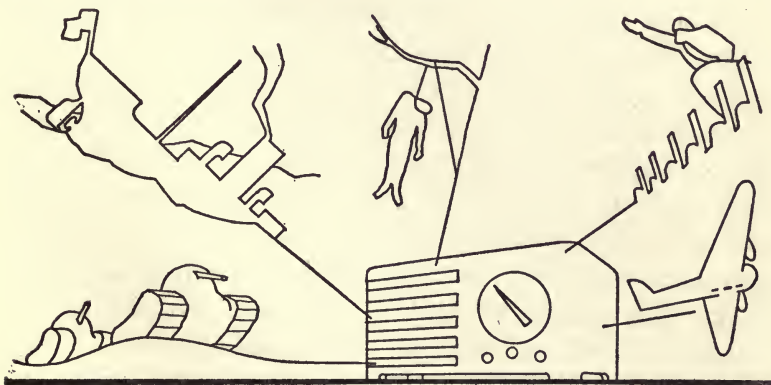
Here we are, the five of us — my mother and father, my wife, my daughter, and I. Each of us has his work to do. My mother and my wife do all the housework and contribute a good deal to the remaking of the house. My father, before his illness, did most of the chores. My daughter, when she is not completely absorbed with school and music lessons and stamp collecting and feeding the birds and reading books, helps with dishes and cleaning, and does some of the work in the gardens.

Usually I spend the morning and the early afternoon writing, if I am doing any writing, or in research. The latter part of the afternoon is the time for painting the house or gardening or household chores or cutting wood. In the evening, if we are alone, I read — publishers' manuscripts and books to review, or, if I am lucky, the magazines or some book of my choice. In the summer there may be visitors one or two evenings a week, and we talk or play games. In the winter visitors are few, and often we read aloud for an hour or two before going to bed.

I remember a particular day last summer. Until four in the afternoon I worked on an article that went very well indeed. When I had done all that I felt like doing, and far more than I had expected to do, I took up the day's chore, which happened to be scrubbing the study floor so that my wife could paint it. When that was done, I had had exercise enough, but I wanted to get outdoors. Taking my bush hook, I started out with my daughter for the pond. The path was grown over,

and we cleared it out as we went along. We looked at the water, skipped a few stones, and got back in time for supper. In the evening I read for the first time George Moore's *Esther Waters*, and found it surprisingly good.

As I sat alone, toward eleven o'clock, drinking a glass of beer, the day seemed finished, rounded out, with nothing further conceivable but sleep. In the quiet of that last half hour before going to bed, I let myself enjoy the awareness of the good day it had been. Then, glancing at my watch, I got up, almost as a matter of habit, and, with my mind still fixed on what I had done that day and planned to do the next, turned on the radio. *Hitler will not allow the Loyalists to win. Rebels repulsed on the Guadalajara front. Miners threatening another march on Johnstown.*



I went to bed, as I go so many nights, with my head swimming, not from beer, but from the sense of the fabulous complexity of the world — the worlds! — I live in.

Last night it was much the same. Yesterday was the coldest day we have had this winter. We got up to find the thermome-

ter at twelve below zero, and immediately I rushed down cellar to start the pump. When I heard the water gurgling in the pipe, I breathed easy — no freeze-up. Then I looked out — at the bright snow, at the frost that glistened on the trees, at the bluest sky I have ever seen. We sat down to breakfast, arguing about temperatures in other years, describing the noises we had heard during the night, and in general feeling rather pleased with ourselves for having survived the cold.

After breakfast I set out for the village with mail. The starter groaned; the engine caught, spluttered, died; again and again I stepped on the starter, growing worried; at last the engine roared. Since the road had been plowed the preceding afternoon, I had little difficulty, though the engine took some coaxing at first and the drifts beside the road pulled at the wheels. Just as I reached the state road, I glanced at the temperature gauge, and, startled, saw the indicator swing to the extreme right. I pulled up at the filling station by the corner, threw a blanket over the hood, and raced the motor. The man who keeps the station came out and condoled with me — it was he who had reported I was safe to twenty below — and we breathed simultaneous sighs of relief as we saw the gauge swing back. "Just caught a little," he said, and poured into the radiator the two quarts of anti-freeze I ordered.

At the post office my report of twelve below was met with stories of eighteen and twenty, and we discussed the state of the highways. A larger group at the village store, where I stopped to do an errand, was recalling historic cold spells. On the way back, when I called on our neighbor to get the milk, he and his wife wanted to know all that I had heard in the vil-

lage, and they proudly called attention to the comfort they were getting from their new furnace.

It was past ten when I reached the house, and there were still some chores to do, but at last I settled down to work. The new study was warm, and the sun shone so brightly through the dormer window that I had to leave my desk and set up my typewriter in the middle of the room. My work was interrupted at noon, when I went to get the mail, and I read the papers until lunch. After lunch I worked until half-past three, and then piled some fireplace wood. I was glad enough to stop after half an hour, and came back to the writing of this book. I worked steadily until supper and for an hour or so afterward, and then read Rex Warner's *The Wild Goose Chase* until my wife suggested that we play Pig — maybe you call it Ghost.

She beat me roundly and went to bed. I wandered around a while, looking at stoves and doors and pipes; for the thermometer, which had not risen above zero all day, was dropping again toward ten below. Satisfied that everything was all right, I sat in front of the fireplace, smoking and thinking, until I remembered the news. *Rebels bomb Barcelona; women and children killed. New attack threatened on relief standards. French cabinet falls. Chinese battling Japanese on three fronts.*

As I got into bed, an idea for a story tossed about in my mind. Not to make it too autobiographical, the hero might be a painter. He would live in the country somewhere, his hours filled with his work, his family, and his home. He would have his problems of course: some days his work wouldn't go well; occasionally he might disagree with his wife; there would be financial worries now and again. But on the whole he would have a good life.



There was, however, one serious threat to his happiness. Every night at eleven a demon appeared to him, a soft-spoken, persistent, sardonic demon. "So," the demon would say, "you've been enjoying yourself. You think you've accomplished something — done a moderately good picture, had a pleasant talk with your children, hoed the potatoes, read a book. You're sitting there, well-satisfied, believing you've solved one or two of life's riddles.

"Well, my friend, this is all very pretty, but it is unfortunately my duty to inform you that you are dreaming. I will permit you to go back to your dream, but for five minutes you must open your eyes."

Perhaps at this point the artist might talk back. "No," he would cry, "it is this interruption that is a dream. You are a monster in a nightmare."

"It is permitted to you," the demon would politely say, "to think so."

The artist, desperately eager not to be convinced, would challenge his visitor: "Prove to me that my life is a dream."

"Nothing could be easier," the demon would reply. "Let me tell you what kind of world you live in, and then you will see that there cannot be the slightest semblance of reality in this charming fantasy of painting, hoeing, talking, reading. Today Japanese troops gathered hundreds of Chinese civilians in the public square of one of China's cities and shot them down with machine guns. Today two Spanish babies, sleeping in their beds, were blown to bits. Today German secret service agents entered the home of an obscure Protestant pastor, took him from the midst of a family engaged in evening prayers, and dragged him to a concentration camp. Today a spy

wrecked a Russian train, and a score of Soviet citizens died. Today a woman, whose husband had been discharged from the W.P.A., murdered her children and committed suicide. Today a Negro boy, committed to life imprisonment for a crime he did not commit, was taken from jail by a mob and burned to death. Today police fired upon strikers, killing one and wounding twelve. Today —”

“Stop!” shouted the artist.

“Very well,” the demon answered. “I have come to you through the courtesy of Razzle Dazzle, the scintillating soap of sophisticated sex appeal.”

What happened to the artist? Was the demon right, and did he wake up? I had not made up my mind how to end the story when I fell asleep.

It does not matter. I am not the artist of my story. I do not forget during all but five minutes of the day what kind of world it is I live in. I could not forget if I wanted to. No demon has to point with mocking finger at the cruelties and absurdities of every day. I want to know what happens in Spain, in China, in Jersey City, for I realize that they are as much part of my life as this study in which I am writing or that field on which I can look.

The other day a man came to see me, a worker in the Communist Party. After he had finished his business, he looked about the place and said, “A beautiful spot; but, comrade, where is the class struggle?”

A stupid remark, and an unimportant one, for that kind of unimaginativeness is not common. Does one have to be in the trenches to know there is a war? Is there only one way to serve the cause of justice? If I had come here for the express

purpose of escaping what my friend calls the class struggle, I could not do it; and what I came here for was not escape but participation. I came here to organize my energies most effectively in order to do the work that I can do best. I came to serve in my way the cause that my friend is serving in his.

Yet, to return to the artist of my unfinished fable, there is a contrast between the way I live here and what is going on in the world outside, and no one could be more conscious of it than I. There are moments — many of them — when I become wrapped up in what I am doing, and when reminders of the world of strife are as shocking as the ominous voice of the artist's demon.

I sit here in my new study, and, as I try to formulate a phrase, I look out of the window, the new window, the window we built. In the midst of the lawn, now covered deep with snow, our Christmas tree is standing, placed there by my daughter. A jay drops from the big maple near the garden, and begins eating the crumbs she put there. Another jay comes and another. One of them flies into the lilac bush, and I get up so that I can watch him. He lights near the suet, but there is a woodpecker busy there, and the jay does not quite dare drive him away. Half a dozen chickadees are hopping about the lilac and dashing to and from the feeding tray that is outside the kitchen window. Among them, no doubt, is the one we rescued last night when, numbed by the cold, he fell asleep on the suet. He was an unwilling guest in our home, but he seemed chipper enough when he left this morning.

I turn back to my work, marveling that I have the good fortune to live in a world that is well enough ordered so that we have time — and food — to spare for the birds. I am wise



enough to rejoice, but I do not therefore ignore the other world, the world of struggling, suffering millions.

Suppose the artist of our fable at last grows impatient with the demon's taunting, and says to himself, "I must know the truth." He decides to forego painting for a time. "I will find out," he says, "what kind of houses people really live in, what kind of jobs they have, what happens to them when they haven't jobs, what kind of food they eat. I will discover what they want and what the chances are of their getting it. I will find out how things are and why they are. I will learn about other people and perhaps learn something about myself as well." So the artist takes to the road, keeping his eyes wide open, and, after a time, he takes to the library, for he realizes that he cannot see everything for himself and must find out what other students have seen and thought. At last he comes back, looks the demon squarely in the eye, and says to him — what?

Perhaps we shall know when we come to the end of this book. I cannot pretend that I set out with the unbiased eye of my imaginary artist, for I have been thinking about these things for a long time, but I can tell you some of the things he might discover. I shall not point out to you the beauty spots that I have mentioned — and that personally I should be delighted to revisit. They are facts, but there are other kinds of facts, too. We need the kind of patriotism that can look at all the facts and still say, "I like America."

Snow is beginning to fall as I write this. Snow is good here, not a horrid sooty mess to be disposed of as soon as possible, but a delicate beauty laid over the bleakness of winter. We might be snowed in for a day or two, but there is food and

fuel enough. If the car is stuck in a snowbank, neighbors will help us dig it out. The worst that snow can do to us is not to be feared, and it is very beautiful.

Tomorrow, sitting here in the new study, I will look out and see the tracks that the squirrels and rabbits — perhaps even a deer — made in the night. I wonder if I have said too much about the new study. It is not much, really. You probably are sitting in a much more luxurious room. But it is ours, for us an undertaking and an achievement.

And it represents a decision, too. It didn't cost a great deal, but conceivably the money ought to have gone to Spain. That depends, doesn't it, on what I do in the new study. I might dedicate it to this exploration of America that is to be carried on here.



### III. A Room with a View

**I HAVE** spoken so much of the house we live in because it plays an important part in our lives. If they are good lives, it is in some measure responsible.

It gives us space enough to live in. There are five of us, and there are seven rooms in the house: a big, light kitchen facing south; the living room with its fireplace; two bedrooms downstairs; two bedrooms and my study upstairs. Any one of us can do anything he has to do without interfering with the others. There's more than space; there's privacy, which is freedom. Right now my father is listening to the radio and my daughter is practicing on the piano. Neither is bothering the other. I can hear both, but only faintly.

Since it's a single house off in the country, we don't have to worry about air. Light has never been any problem in the daytime — I have friends in expensive New York apartments who can't say as much — and now it is no problem in the evening. Electricity, by the way, not only solves the lighting

problem; it also, like privacy, is freedom. All sorts of jobs that once had to be done by daylight can now be done whenever it's convenient. New tools are placed at our disposal: a washing machine, an electric iron, a vacuum cleaner. The whole house can be lived in more fully than it could before.

We keep warm enough, although not without effort. Heat, for most of my city friends, is something you give the superintendent hell about if you don't get it. Heat, for us, as I have said, means cutting wood or going out and buying it, means providing oil in advance, means setting up stoves and cleaning smoke pipes, means putting on storm windows, means the daily session with the axe in the woodshed. We keep warm all right, but not so easily that we can't imagine being cold.

We have good water and plenty of it, since we had the new well drilled. We use the deep well for drinking water, which we carry by hand, and as a standby in time of drought. The old dug well at present supplies the house. It's not a very convenient system. Somebody has to go down cellar every day and run a gasoline engine for ten or fifteen minutes in order to fill the tank at the top of the house. (Now that we have electricity, we can attach an automatic pump to the deep well — when we have money enough.) But there is water in the house. We use the privy in good weather, but the point is that we don't have to use it when the weather is bad.

Reading this description, you may be moved to pity us. To you this house of ours seems horribly uncomfortable. But it does have the essentials — space, air, light, heat, water. And the fact that we can't take most of these things for granted makes us realize that plenty of houses haven't them.

I have seen such houses, and so have you. Once in the spring



of 1933 I got on the wrong road in Vermont and drove for hours in the back country. I have always thought of Vermont as a state of sturdy, self-sufficient farmers, indifferent to luxuries but well-supplied with the necessities of life. This time, however, I saw unadulterated squalor. Half a dozen ragged children stood outside a tar paper shack and watched us pass. A quarter of a mile farther on we caught sight of tumbled-down barns and a weather-beaten, windowless house. Another abandoned farm, we thought, but there was smoke coming out of the chimney, two goats were tied on what had been the front lawn, and a one-legged man with a crutch was planting potatoes. A dozen times before we got back on the highway we saw stark and hideous poverty.

This was, of course, in the midst of the depression. Probably it was no more typical of Vermont than the Hooverville that rose in 1932 between the tracks and the river was typical of Albany. Not only was the Hooverville untypical; it was, for most residents of Albany, nonexistent. They almost never had occasion to see it, could catch only a glimpse of it from the railroad. Yet there it was, this little community of maybe a hundred homes. Homes made of packing boxes, rusty sheets of tin, and stray boards. Smoke came from chimneys of broken tile or tin cans. And you could see the inhabitants picking over the nearby dump to find materials for extension or improvement.

But wait! Not two miles from here, and not ten feet from the state road, there is a sagging two-room hut, rather picturesque, with a great lilac bush half-covering it. You may have noticed it, and noticed the gaunt old woman moving painfully about outside. There used to be two old women, but

one of them died last winter. The town supervisor wanted to move the body, but the sister was determined to have it laid out there. The next morning rats had eaten off the feet. This was not on Tobacco Road but on one of New York's main traffic arteries.

Of course, you say, it needn't have happened. The sisters might have gone to an institution, and few institutions are overrun with rats. True, but it did happen! And I could find a dozen homes just as squalid within five miles of this room.

Let us go a little farther afield. Let us drive through the streets of one of our upstate cities, Troy or Albany or Schenectady, noting the houses we would be damned unhappy to have to live in. We come first to the big single houses, with plenty of rooms, well-kept lawns, gardens, and garages. These yield quickly to the small, close-packed, impersonal homes and the identical two-family houses of the respectable lower middle class. We would not choose, perhaps, to live here, but we could be comfortable enough.

Down the hill, and we think, if we think at all, that these are old houses. Old and, most of them, unhealthy. And crowded. Notice the "to let" signs. Every one of these houses was broken up long ago into tiny apartments. As you drive through the section, you exclaim impatiently at the children in the street. Where, you ask, do they come from? From right up there, from little two-room or one-room flats on the second or third stories of those old houses. Probably that old woman who is yelling at them is paid a little to watch them, after her fashion, or does it out of the kindness of her heart. Their mothers are working at the collar factories. Their fathers are working or looking for jobs or maybe they've disappeared.

We drive on, into the factory section. There is nothing flamboyant about this poverty. You could drive through these streets day after day and make no more response than a shrug of your shoulders. But try to imagine that you are on foot and hunting for a home you can afford on sixteen dollars a week. Would you like to live there, with railroad tracks on both sides? It's noisy and dirty, but you could get four rooms for your money and a little privacy. It might be better than three rooms in the tenement block down the street.

And certainly you could do worse. Perhaps, trying to dodge traffic, you have turned into some alley. Again you have wondered at the number of children. Why do they choose to play here, of all places? Because they live here. Notice, next to the delivery entrances of stores and garages, the open doors that show flights of stairs. Then look up. There are windows with curtains in them and lines of clothes stretched across the alley. People do live here.

People live in strange places. Lots of people. More than fifty years ago inspectors went around the city of New York, condemning certain tenement houses as unfit to live in. Half of those they condemned still stand, and people pay rent to inhabit them. In 1901 a new law was passed in New York, and houses built before that law and not conforming to it are called "old law" tenements. Such tenements today house half a million families — about a quarter of the city's population.

You can go exploring in New York or you can read the statistics in books and magazine articles. You can learn, for example, that a million people can't go to the bathroom without leaving their homes, to go either to a hall toilet shared by four or five families or to an outside privy. You can find eleven



people living in a three-room apartment, with five children sleeping in a three-quarter bed in the dining room. You can find, crowded into two rooms, four beds, a crib, a coal range, a sink, a washtub, a dresser, a chair, and nine people. There are hundreds of thousands of rooms that open only on air shafts. There are rooms with no windows at all. And every once in a while one of these tenement houses burns down, and the death of two or three or a dozen children reminds the newspapers, for twenty-four hours, that the city is full of firetraps.

New York is no worse than other cities. Several years ago investigators studied the slum district in Cincinnati, visiting six thousand flats. They found more than four thousand outside toilets and only eighty bathtubs. Every second flat they visited had only two rooms, and the number of persons living in them ranged all the way from one to seventeen.

In Philadelphia there are ten thousand outside toilets, and the same number in St. Louis. A housing survey was made in Minneapolis just last year, and here are the results: 7,876 dwellings that had no water facilities at all, not even a pump; 15,844 without private indoor toilets; 22,683 with neither bathtub nor shower.



Can you stand a few more figures? The government studied housing three or four years ago in sixty-four moderate-sized cities. Investigators examined nearly two million buildings, in which more than nine million people lived. More than half needed repairs. Nearly half had no central heating. A quarter had no tubs or showers. Nearly a fifth were overcrowded. A sixth lacked private indoor toilets.

In 1932 the editors of *Fortune* Magazine wrote a book called *Housing America*, which summarizes the results of many surveys. I have quoted some of the figures given in that book. And here is the conclusion the editors of *Fortune* reached: "Less than half the homes in America measure up to minimum standards of health and decency."

Last November, Nathan Straus, Administrator of the Federal Housing Authority, told the United States Chamber of Commerce: "Whether we like to face it or not the fact remains that the United States is the most backward country in the civilized world in providing decent housing for our people. We have piled up an appalling number of slums." One-third of the nation, he said, exists in misery and filth.

You can now understand why I cannot take air and water and heat and light for granted. At least forty million Americans don't have what I have. I am glad that I am decently housed and that so are from sixty to eighty million others, but I can't forget the forty million who have to choose between enough heat and enough light, between sanitation and space, between cleanliness and safety. They cannot have all these things. Many have none of them.

There is nothing that I have ever seen bleaker than a Pennsylvania coal patch. I remember one not far from Pittsburgh.

You drive out ten or fifteen miles in the open country. There is plenty of space, but suddenly you come on a little cluster of houses, perhaps fifty of them, pressed as tightly together as if the land had the value of a Manhattan block. The patch is on one side of the highway, and on the other is a mound of refuse — slack they call it — about a hundred feet high. It is smouldering, and the smoke hangs over the patch, filling the houses with its fumes.

You turn in the gate by the entrance to the mine, and notice the men waiting for the elevator. A narrow muddy lane winds up the hillside toward the patch. You come first to a moderately neat two-story building — the company store. There are groceries and dresses and furniture in the window. You can buy anything you need here, and, if you were a miner, you would have to buy it here, though the prices are lower in Pittsburgh.

The road turns again, and you are in the middle of the patch. All the houses are exactly alike, square, flimsy boxes, with tar paper roofs. The unpainted clapboards are so thin you half expect to be able to put your hand through them. In back of each house is a row of privies, and by counting them you can tell the number of families. Each family has two or three rooms, with only a single window to a room. Inside, the floors are likely to be as clean as soap and water can make splintered boards, and there are usually pictures on the wall, cut from magazines or old calendars. But of course the rooms are crowded, and, as the smoke beats down, you can see that the fight for cleanliness cannot be won.

It all seems about as mean as anything could be, and you are staggered when you are told that it is considered much too

good for Negroes. They are segregated at the very back of the patch, and somehow it has been found possible to make their houses even smaller and shoddier, though the company takes as much from their pay for rent as it takes from the others.

*Housing America* says this is typical of company towns. A survey was made of over four hundred such towns in different parts of the country. Can you imagine a big company town of fifty thousand dwellings? Only one out of every five has bath, water closet, running water, and gas or electricity. Two out of every five have none of these.

In the South many textile towns insist that there must be a millworker for every room. Thus they secure the maximum of overcrowding and offer another incentive for child labor. Mining companies in the West have found a simpler solution of the housing problem: they let their Mexican employees put up for themselves such shacks as they can scrape together.

The strange places that people live in! The same day that I saw the coal patch I woke up in Johnstown, which is an alarming thing to do. I was on my way to Pittsburgh on the sleeper, and I was roused by the stopping of the train. Sleepily I pushed up the curtain just in time to see "Johnstown" on the station sign, and, remembering the famous strike, I kept the curtain up and my eyes open as the train moved along again. As I saw mills and then row after row of company houses and then more mills and then more company houses, I wondered if I were really awake. At six o'clock of a cloudy October morning, with only a few men in sight and here and there boys with lunchboxes, with dark smoke over the mills and with dead leaves blowing about the empty streets, Johnstown seemed some fabled limbo. There were mountains in the



background, impressive even on that gloomy morning, and they made it seem ridiculous that people should be living side by side, back door to back door, front door to front door, in identical, small, flimsy wooden houses. Eight miles, so a sign proudly said, of mills, and thousands, it seemed to me, of houses not fit for human beings.

But a friend of mine, to whom I told something of this, promptly said, "You haven't seen anything. I'd like to take you down South and show you how the tenant farmers live. I know a little village of about forty families. Four or five live in old-fashioned log cabins. The rest live in board houses that aren't much better. In some of those houses you can see light through the cracks, and I've felt the rain come in. Not one of them has running water, and some carry their water from a spring some way off. There are only about ten privies on the place, if you know what that means."

I know. I read a statement a year or so ago by Secretary of Agriculture Wallace, who said, "I have never seen among the peasantry of Europe poverty as abject as that which exists in this favorable cotton year in the great cotton states." I have looked at Margaret Bourke-White's photographs in *You Have Seen Their Faces*, and read Erskine Caldwell's text.

One of our fellow-townsmen keeps his cows and horses in a barn that has partly fallen down. Snow sifts in and piles up in corners of the stables, and the winds sweep through without interference. Time and again I have heard farmers curse the man and threaten to report him to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Yet there are human beings housed just as badly as those horses and cows.

Why do people live in shacks, in log cabins, in sod houses?

Why do they live in coal patches and company towns and firetrap tenements?

Not because there isn't room in the United States. Not because there isn't enough lumber and brick and cement. Not because there aren't skilled workmen.

According to the National Housing Committee, which is headed by Monsignor John A. Ryan of the National Catholic Welfare Council, America needs immediately two million new housing units. Why can't they be built? The architects, the contractors, the carpenters and bricklayers and house painters all want work. But these two million houses and apartments have got to be built to rent for thirty dollars a month or less. Two hundred thousand, indeed, of the families that would like to live in them cannot pay more than ten dollars a month. One million, four hundred thousand cannot pay over twenty dollars. The others are willing to pay between twenty and thirty dollars.

The housing problem is simply the income problem. Ten years ago this nation was at the peak of the greatest boom it had ever known. Politicians talked about our unprecedented prosperity. Foreign economists came over to see how we had done it. Preachers said we were becoming a degenerate, materialistic people, corrupted by our wealth.

Yet ten years ago, according to the conservative Brookings Institution, there were six million families in the United States with an income of less than \$1,000 a year. There were ten and a half million families with incomes from \$1,000 to \$2,000. There were five million families with from \$2,000 to \$3,000, somewhat less than four million with between \$3,000 and \$5,000, and about two million with over \$5,000.



In other words, when American prosperity was at its height, considerably more than half the people did not have money enough to secure the basic necessities of life. And considerably less than a quarter of the American people were enjoying anything that could be called luxury.

Today, though exact figures are not available, we know that conditions are very much worse. One out of every four families in New York City, for example, has an income of less than \$1,000 a year. One-half the families in the city, though often there is more than one member of the family working, cannot afford what the United States Government calls "a minimum health and decency budget." And half of New York's Negro families get less than \$837 a year.

Nor are conditions any better elsewhere. In the small villages of the nation the average family has to get along on \$1,100 a year or less. A wage earner in a North Dakota or a Kansas village is likely to get between \$800 and \$900 a year. Even a business or a professional man, if he lives in a small town in Illinois or Iowa, will probably receive less than \$1,500.

These are figures from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Home Economics. They can be supplemented by what we know about wages.

What could you expect if you were an unskilled factory worker? If you were just beginning on a new job in a northern factory, the chances are that you would be paid forty-six cents an hour. This, if you worked a forty-hour week, would bring you \$18.40 on payday, and your annual income for fifty weeks would be \$920. If you happened to live in the South, you would probably get thirty-three cents an hour, which would figure out to \$13.20 a week and \$660 a year. If you were a

Negro, you would get twenty-eight cents, or \$11.20 a week and \$560 a year. You might, of course, work more than forty hours a week, though this would be more likely in the lower paid industries. And you would almost certainly have less than fifty weeks' work a year.

The chances of your getting enough for minimum health and decency, if you are an industrial worker, are not very good. The government has collected statistics for many industries, and there is not one in which the average wage comes up to scratch.

The average automobile worker, for example, is paid about \$1,700 a year, if he is lucky enough to work fifty weeks. (That is only slightly more than General Motors pays Alfred P. Sloan every single day of the year.) In iron and steel the average is \$32.48 a week. (Every week Myron Taylor, Ernest Weir, and Tom Girdler, each receives more than two average workmen get in a whole year.) Telephone and telegraph employees average \$30.86 and the workers in the building trades \$31.10. Smelting and refining, paper and printing, and chemical and allied products do a little better than \$28 a week. Aluminum manufactures, lumber and allied products, the food industry, coal mining, and retail trade run close to \$20. Textiles, wearing apparel, and boots and shoes are well under \$20, and laundries average \$16.94. The low point, however, is the tobacco industry, which, despite its long hours, pays, on the average, only \$16.49. (This is less than G. W. Hill, President of the American Tobacco Company, gets for every ten minutes' work he puts in.)

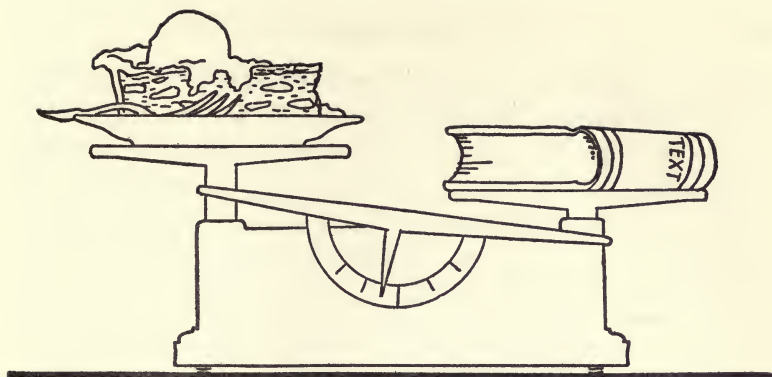
It is not so easy to find out about the income of farmers, but we do know that, whereas there were only a million tenant

farmers in 1880 and two million in 1900, there are more than three million today. We do know that almost a million and a half farms were foreclosed between 1929 and 1936. We do know — because the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy says so — that "thousands of farmers commonly considered owners are as insecure as tenants."

It is no wonder that families do whatever they can to supplement the incomes of their menfolk. It is no wonder that women, often neglecting their homes, take jobs at miserable wages. It is no wonder that more than six hundred thousand children, between ten and fifteen years old, were, according to the last census, laboring in factories and on farms.

E. M. Forster once wrote a novel called *A Room With a View*. Virginia Woolf entitled one of her essays *A Room of One's Own*. These are phrases that mean something to us. They have no meaning at all to millions of Americans. For these millions a room is something to be shared with two or three or a dozen others, and a view is a chance to look at a dingy court or a pile of slack.

I sit in my new study, and look out at snow-covered fields and woods and mountains. I think, "If you had an income of twenty dollars a week, and a family of five to support, where would you live?" I know the answer: in some flimsy company house, in some slum tenement, in some dingy alley, in some dirt-floored cabin. And I ask myself, "How would you like America?"



## IV. Choices and Chances

ONE NIGHT last summer my wife and I were visiting a popular journalist, who also had as guests a British novelist and a sociologist. The journalist started talking about the very rich. "We don't have any idea," he said, "how they live." And he spoke about a millionaire who, on the spur of the moment, invited a dozen guests to have dinner with him on his yacht. "Do you realize," the journalist went on, "that he has to keep a full staff on that yacht every minute, so that, once a fortnight or so, if the whim enters his head, he can take a little trip down the harbor and eat a meal? Think of the thousands of dollars he spends just to have the right to make that choice."

We went on talking about wealth in terms of choices. I know little about the habits of the rich, but the journalist and the novelist told story after story. Finally the journalist's wife spoke up and said, "You know, as I listen to your



stories, it strikes me that their wealth doesn't really get them much. They reach the point where they have to spend thousands of dollars to have the right to make one additional choice. Look at the woman you were just speaking of, who has seven houses in different parts of the world and is just building another one. I suppose she'll spend more on that house than any of us will have to spend in his lifetime, and she won't get any good out of it except maybe two or three weeks a year. It reminds me of what I learned in college about the law of diminishing returns."

At this the novelist became philosophical. He talked about the Stoics, and said the only way to increase satisfactions was to diminish desires. He quoted Thoreau.

The sociologist brought us back to reality. "Look here," she said; "we're all talking as if the population of the United States were made up of people as rich as we are or richer. You know perfectly well that all of us belong to the privileged ten percent — or maybe it's five. We talk about the two percent at the top and forget the ninety percent at the bottom. Even our jobless professor here," nodding at me, "is making more than most of the gainfully employed in this country. Why, the amount he gets from reading publishers' manuscripts, which he regards as a sideline, is almost as much as the average wage of industrial workers. It makes me sick to hear persons arguing that, because the rich spend money foolishly, the poor are well off. Stop talking about the choices of the rich and think about the choices of the poor."

Of course she was right, and I knew it — from experience. My boyhood was pretty frugal, and my four years in college were a struggle. I know what it is to breakfast on fifteen cents



and lunch on thirty-five in order to have fifty for dinner — and that at a time when prices were higher than they are now. I have often walked three miles to save ten cents subway fare. I can remember when a new suit meant six months' planning, and when having to buy a textbook meant going without deserts, which I loved, for a week.

I told a little of all this. "Come," said the novelist, "it didn't do you a bit of harm."

I admitted that in one respect he was right: in the world as it existed I was not sorry to have experienced what, after all, we had to regard as the common way of life. "Otherwise," I said, "you're quite wrong. I would be the first to admit that many boys get nothing out of college because they're immature, have no sense of responsibility, and can't see the world as it really is. As a teacher, I have been sick at the sight of middle-class parents sacrificing themselves and all their own possibilities of enjoyment and growth so that their sons and daughters might compete with the children of the rich. I am sure that, with things as they are, such boys would be better off if they had to give up a little for the sake of their education.

"But if you think that I got as much out of college as I might have, you are mistaken. I had enough food and a comfortable room and adequate clothes, but the damned worrying! The years in college are naturally an expansive time for a boy. He is not only learning new things; he is making new friends, having new experiences, cultivating new desires. He is interested in sports, in girls, perhaps in the theater and music. Even a studious boy, and God knows I was that, sees more in college than books.

"Now imagine what it is like, when you have all this boil-

ing inside you, to have to think of every penny. I just said that I wanted more than books. Well, much of the time I couldn't even have books. I had to borrow copies from friends or use them in the library. And I liked books and wanted to own them.

"The wonder to me is that I wasn't miserable in college. I wasn't. I did have friends, even girls, though necessarily of the less demanding kind. I saw many plays, and I did not enjoy them the less because I sat in the second balcony. But I never went on parties, for parties always involved unpredictable expenses, and my pleasures had to be carefully budgeted. It seemed to me that I was saying no most of the time."

I was beginning to feel a little self-pity, but the sociologist fixed that. "Remember," she said, "that you had really chosen all this. You didn't have to go to college. A bright boy like you could have got a job that would have paid for dances and parties and all the rest."

"But then," said the journalist's wife, "he'd have had no future."

"Exactly. I mean, whether that's true or not, it's what he would have thought. All through those bad years in college he believed — he knew — he was going to escape from his little hardships, and that made them endurable. Suppose there had been no chance of escape, as there seems to be none for millions who face major hardships every day of their lives."

And that is how we came to discuss the cruel choices that poverty forces upon millions, instead of discussing the luxurious choices for which the infinitesimal minority pays such huge sums.

Paul De Kruif in *Why Keep Them Alive?* quotes from a pamphlet called "Emergency Nutrition," by Professor Henry C. Sherman. This pamphlet answers a simple question. What should a mother do when she has to choose between milk and bread for her children? "Should she crowd milk out because a penny spent for bread goes further to still the pangs of hunger?" No, Professor Sherman says, milk is more important. It is less filling, but more nutritive. It will keep a child alive. Given milk *and* a little bread, a baby can not only live but even, after a fashion, grow.

That is a choice we wouldn't like to have to make. Milk or bread. Milk or a little green vegetable. Bread or a taste of meat. Yet hundreds of thousands of mothers have to make such choices every single day. In 1935 a New York newspaper reported: "One hundred and thirty-five thousand pupils in New York City's elementary schools are so weak from malnutrition that they cannot profit by attendance in regular classes." One hundred and thirty-five thousand in New York alone. How many throughout the country? Six million, at least, according to the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. Six million in 1930, before the depression really got started. Probably eight or ten million when it was at its worst.

Mr. De Kruif has told us of another choice that the poor have to make. Down South the poor eat meat (sow belly and fat back), meal, and molasses — and the children die of pellagra. For ten years the causes and cure of pellagra have been known. In the South the Red Cross has distributed yeast, which will cure it, and seeds to grow the green stuff that will prevent it. Pellagra is on the way out.

But, Mr. De Kruif warns us, if prosperity returns, pellagra

may return too. It sounds fantastic, but here is the explanation. If there is a boom in cotton or tobacco, farmers will want, or will be compelled by the owners, to use all their land for the profit-making crops. The little patches of green vegetables will disappear.

That would be stupid, you say. Of course. But there's a choice being made. Cotton means money, and money means clothes, tools, house improvements, medicine. All of us, I am sure, would be too wise to give pellagra a chance. But we have never had to make a choice like that. We can have green vegetables *and* enough money for daily expenses.

Some time ago I got hold of a little leaflet issued by the United States Government, containing two family food budgets, one a restricted diet for emergency use and the other called "an adequate diet at minimum cost." I showed it to my mother and my wife, and we went into executive session. The first column gave a diet for two adults, the second for two adults and a child. Adding these together gives the total for a family our size: four adults and one child.

"Milk," I said, "two quarts a day. That isn't bad."

"We average at least two quarts and a pint. You know how much of the time we get three quarts. And look —"

"Yes, I know. Milk is the one thing the budget really allows for. The leaflet says one-third of the food money is to be spent for milk and cheese. If we went on that basis, we'd have between forty and fifty cents a day to spend for everything else."

"We get about four dozen eggs a week."

"This budget allows for nine."

"Nine dozen?"



"Nine eggs. And two pounds and a half of lean meat and fish."

"What did we have this week? A leg of lamb on Sunday, a little over four pounds. That did for Monday too. A pound and a half of sausages on Tuesday. A pound and a half of pork chops on Wednesday. Then we had oyster stew Wednesday night — a pint of oysters. A pound and a half of hamburg Thursday. A pound and a half of fillet of haddock today. Tomorrow we'll have beans, of course, at night; so maybe I'll have salmon loaf for lunch."

"Say twelve pounds of meat and fish this week."

"What about vegetables?"

I examine the chart. "We're allowed fifteen pounds of potatoes."

"A peck. That's all right."

"Two pounds and a half of dried beans and peas."

"I bake about a pound and a half of beans Saturdays."

"Four No. 2 cans of tomatoes."

"That's two quarts. We must use pretty nearly two quarts of our own tomatoes a week. I canned forty-three quarts, and that will last us well into the winter."

"And we use about two quarts of tomato juice besides."

"Then we come to leafy, yellow-colored, and green-colored vegetables — five pounds."

"This week we've had four pounds of squash, two pounds of carrots, a pound and a half of spinach, two pounds of string beans, two pounds of peas, a head of cauliflower, and a head of lettuce. Say thirteen pounds."

"And in summer we have fresh corn and tomatoes and beans and carrots and the rest out of our own garden."

"Dried fruit — one pound."



"We don't have much, thank goodness; prunes and apricots once in a while."

"Would raisins count? We use nearly a pound a week."

My daughter breaks in. "You mean I do."

"Four pounds of other vegetables and fruits."

"I get a dozen oranges, three to six lemons. That's all."

"Oh, apples. And look at the grapes we got last fall when we were making jelly and conserve."

"And for that matter, the currants we picked, and the blueberries. All the canning we do has to count somewhere."

"Well, I'll go on. Ten loaves of bread and fifteen pounds of assorted cereals."

"That's more than we use."

"You have to fill up on something."

"A pound of butter or margarine."

"We use two pounds or more of good country butter."

"Three and a quarter pounds of lard, oils, salt pork, bacon."

"We don't use quite that."

"Four pounds of sugar."

"We use five."

"More than that, if you average in what we use in canning time."

"A pint of syrup."

"We don't use that."

"But we do have candy once in a while."

"A pound of cheese."

"More than we use."

"A pound of coffee."

"We use two pounds."

"A quarter of a pound of tea."

"Yes."

"A quarter of a pound of cocoa."

"Yes."

"That's all."

"We use more milk, five times as many eggs, five times as much meat and fish, more than twice as many vegetables. To say nothing of a lot of extras."

My daughter breaks in again: "I guess we live pretty well."

Her grandmother sighs. "I never thought we were hearty eaters. My father ate three eggs for breakfast every morning. And Dad's father had a piece of beefsteak three or four mornings a week. Well, this leaflet says that the diets are for emergency use only."

But what is an emergency? In 1929, before the depression began, at least one out of every eight families in the United States was living on this emergency diet. In 1932 and 1933 probably one-third or more of the people in the United States had no more and no better food than this.

Last July, Harry Hopkins, Federal Works Progress Administrator, announced, as a result of a careful study, that a family of four must have an income of \$982 to exist on an "emergency" level in New York City. We know that a quarter of the families in New York had less than \$1,000. No doubt many of these enjoyed a more ample diet than that I have described, but obviously their extra food was purchased by sacrifices elsewhere.

A maintenance budget, according to Mr. Hopkins, would come to \$1,375 in New York. "The higher standard," he stated, "measures only the amount required for basic maintenance, without provision for saving, while the lower is

frankly an emergency level, insufficient to maintain health and physical efficiency for any considerable period of time."

On a maintenance budget a family of four could live in a four or five room flat, equipped with gas, electricity, an ice-box, and a radio. They could read a daily newspaper, go to the movies once a week, and enjoy "an adequate diet at minimum cost." They could have suitable clothes for their daily work and be decently clad on Sundays. The man could carry a small insurance policy, and there would be enough for dental and medical care — if there were no emergencies.

We know that this maintenance budget would, even before the recession, have seemed paradise to more than a third of all the families in the country. Yet it is well below what the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics calls an adequate budget. The adequate budget — though scarcely providing for a car in every garage and a chicken in every pot — is somewhere near to what we have in mind when we talk about an American standard of living. At present prices it would cost about \$1,900 in New York City, \$2,100 in Chicago, \$2,250 in Los Angeles, nearly \$2,300 in San Francisco. It is out of the reach of considerably more than half of the people of the United States.

If you belonged to one of the ten million families whose incomes fall below Mr. Hopkins' maintenance level, how would you choose your indecencies? Would you live in a crowded, badly-lighted, badly-ventilated flat in order to have almost as much food as your family needs, or would you give your children privacy and sunlight and fresh air but deprive them of the fruit and milk and meat you know they need? Would you send them to school with their stomachs only half-full or with their feet only half-shod?

If the people who have to make such choices were all brought together in one city or one state, and the rest of us had to go and look at them, if we had to walk through street after street of dingy tenements, looking at thousands of undernourished children, if these things were brought squarely under our noses, we might be moved. If we were told that not a single person in all New England had, day in and day out, enough to eat, we'd start a campaign to feed New England. If we learned that, because of some calamity, not a person west of the Rockies had a decent living standard, we'd raise millions of dollars to help them.

But the trouble is that we don't see. Our lives are so arranged that we don't have to see. You either don't go near the slum areas of your city, or, if you do, your mind is full of the engagement you have to keep or the shopping you have to do or the business you are going to or escaping from. And if your eye sees the undernourished, poorly dressed children on the steps of some dingy hovel, your mind assures you that this is exceptional, that these people are naturally shiftless, that they are perfectly satisfied to live this way.

The families that have enough for decency but not enough for comfort aren't so badly off, of course, but they too have their choices to make, and not very comfortable choices. From the time I was seven until I went to college I lived in such a family. Because of my mother's good management, we had enough to eat and enough to wear, and we lived in a home that, in spite of its lacking some modern conveniences, was perfectly comfortable. But there wasn't enough left over for dental care. I don't know whether my mother and father ever made a conscious choice, but they were faced with this decision: should my older sister go to high school and normal



school, or should we have our teeth taken care of? My sister got her education, which was right, but the teeth, as I can testify, suffered.

This is a trivial example of the kind of choice that persons below the comfort level have to make. Fortunately, we were never confronted with a choice on a more serious level. Many persons are. I pick up one of my weekly magazines and read about the magnificent new cures that science is discovering. Surgeons can now operate to relieve heart disease. There is a short-wave treatment for sinus infections, a rest and starvation treatment for coronary thrombosis, an improved type of insulin, new developments in fever therapy. De Kruif has told us about the effect of sunshine on rheumatic heart disease and the use of artificial pneumothorax, the collapsing of the affected lung, in tuberculosis.

Nothing can be more encouraging than the progress of medicine, but — it costs money. Suppose you had a son who had gone to work and was bringing a little much-needed money into the home. Suppose he developed tuberculosis. The pneumothorax treatment would save him, but he would have to lie in bed, under a doctor's care, for six months or a year. What would you do?

Well, you say, there is such a thing as charity. All right. But first you must overcome your American pride and your American prejudice against institutions. Then you must find a charity clinic or hospital that practices the best methods, and in most of the country that won't be easy. And once you find the institution, you'll be lucky if there isn't a waiting list.

It isn't so easy as it sounds. But even if you are lucky and secure for your son the treatment he needs, there will still be



problems. His illness has reduced the family income, and yet, even in the best institutions, there are extra expenses. When he comes out, cured, thank heaven, he will still have to have rest and special food. What items in the family budget are to be slashed? Meals for the other children? The clothing your husband needs if he is to keep healthy on his job? Or will you cut the rent by crowding into a couple of rooms?

On every level except the wealthiest, the problem of medical care, unless one is uncommonly lucky, comes close to insolubility. We don't have to guess about this: we know. Here are the ten million families whose incomes are below the maintenance level. In this group twice as many persons as in the rest of the population are laid up for periods of a week or more. Nearly twice as many have chronic diseases. For every day that a person with an income of over \$3,000 is ill, a person with an income of less than \$1,000 is ill three.

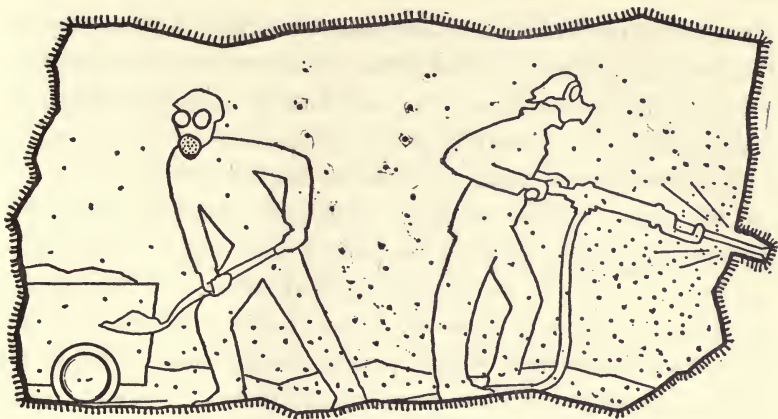
But who keeps the doctors busy, the comfortably well-to-do or the poor? The Committee on the Costs of Medical Care reports that, of the families it surveyed, forty-seven percent of those whose income was under \$1,200 received no medical, dental, or eye care. The same was true of forty-two percent of those whose incomes ranged from \$1,200 to \$2,000. From \$2,000 to \$3,000 the percentage dropped to thirty-seven percent. Of those with incomes over \$10,000 all but fourteen percent received some sort of attention from doctors.

The effect of insufficient food, bad housing, bad working conditions, and inadequate medical care is perfectly clear. There are ten major diseases that cause three-fourths of all the deaths in the United States. Josephine Roche, then Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, told the American Public

Health Association last October that the death rate from these diseases is twice as high among the poorer one-third of the American population as it is among the others. President Hoover's Research Committee on Social Trends said: "Until a point is reached where the death rate does not vary according to income, it seems paradoxical to claim that wage earners are receiving a living wage."

Anyone can see how it works. The wealthier families have nourishing food and healthy homes. Their work is safe and done under pleasant conditions. They are regularly under the care of doctors, and, if they happen to fall ill, they are promptly given the best treatment. Is it any wonder that they have only half as much disease and are sick only one-third as much of the time?

Take, for instance, the matter of the job. Every once in a while, it is true, a businessman or a lawyer or a doctor dies of heart disease. But suppose you were a miner, had always earned your living as a miner, knew nothing but mining, lived in a region in which few other jobs were available. Now one out of four anthracite miners in Pennsylvania has silicosis, which they call miners' asthma, and nine out of ten get it if they stay in the mines for twenty-five years. There are at least a million people in the United States working in industries in which there is a danger of silicosis. Any one of these million is likely, within the next five or ten years, to find that he is short of breath when he does heavy work. If an X-ray is taken, it will show that his lungs are pitted with small scars. In time, if he does not leave his job, he will have to gasp more and more frantically for breath, until at last he is laid off, to succumb to tuberculosis or heart disease.



Or perhaps you are working for the Du Ponts, making Zerone, an anti-freeze for automobile radiators. Zerone is a commercial name for methanol or synthetic wood alcohol, a substance with which two million workers, employed in sixty different industries, come in contact. It can be absorbed through the skin or through the lungs, and it causes blindness and general physical decay.

Or perhaps you work in a rubber factory and are exposed to benzol, lead, carbon disulphide, or naphtha poisoning. Or perhaps it is only lead poisoning that threatens you, as it threatens thousands of automobile workers. There are seven hundred different occupations in the United States in which industrial poisons are a danger. To these poisons can be traced innumerable deaths from tuberculosis, cerebral hemorrhage, Bright's disease, and organic heart disease.

And then there are industrial accidents, steadily on the increase. There were 16,000 deaths caused by industrial accidents in 1935, and 18,000 in 1936. Eighteen thousand deaths,

70,000 injuries resulting in permanent disability, and 1,460,000 resulting in temporary disability. Accidents are now compensated for in all but two states — Arkansas and Mississippi — but by no means all employments are included, and compensation is usually inadequate and often hard to get.

Over forty million people improperly housed. Forty to fifty million with less food than they want, and at least ten million with less than health demands. These same people constantly exposed to disease, because of their surroundings, because of their jobs. These people hit by disease twice as hard as their more fortunate fellow-citizens. These people seeing their children grow up with little chance of advanced education. (In the University of Minnesota there is only one student from a laborer's family for every sixteen hundred adult laborers, but there is one child of a businessman for every twenty-four businessmen in the state.) Sometimes with little chance of more than a rudimentary education. (In seven states of the South \$38 a year is spent for the schooling of a white child, and about \$10 a year for the schooling of a Negro.) Often exposed to the most dangerous influences. (A child brought up in a New York City slum block is twice as likely to find his way into a criminal court as a child from a better part of the city.)

President Roosevelt talks about one-third of the nation being ill-housed, ill-fed, and ill-clad. It would perhaps be accurate to say that more than one-half of the nation is not so well-housed or fed or clad as it ought to be, and that one-quarter of the nation lives in slums and hovels, does not eat well enough to maintain health over any considerable period of time, has inadequate clothing, education, medical care.



You would think these ten million families would walk up and down in front of our comfortable houses, making us look at them, but they don't. They go about their work, when they have any, or stay uncomplainingly in their miserable homes. You'd think the cough-racked silicosis victims and the sharecroppers with their skeleton children would parade in the streets of the capital. But they choose to die in the semi-privacy of their tenements and their cabins.

Because these ten million families don't complain, we ignore them, and, if we have to admit their existence, we say they're morons, and wouldn't appreciate better conditions if they had them. It isn't true, and we really know it isn't. It is easy to say that the poor ought to make their wants known, but I have seen half a hundred hunger-marchers with their heads cracked opened by policemen's clubs, simply because they tried to call their needs to the attention of the legislators of New York State. The governmental machinery that protects us and our property protects our minds as well, keeps from them the knowledge that might prove disturbing. Neither the press nor the radio is open to the poor, and when they take to the streets they are met with clubs.

Force helps to keep the poor from complaining, and sometimes they fall into will-less, purposeless, lifeless docility. We see some of the docile ones, and we call them stupid. If we were wise, we would recognize that they are an indictment of our civilization. They are men and women who have been so reduced by years of undernourishment, so battered by jobs beyond their strength, so terrified by the threat of unemployment, so utterly robbed of confidence and hope, that they have given up the battle. These are the lovable poor that



novelists like to write about, grateful for a charitable crust, keeping their own place. Or they are the improvident poor, also dear to fiction writers because they are so quaint and demonstrate so clearly that their poverty is their own fault.

We like to believe that their attitudes are the cause of their poverty, but of course it is the other way round. My ten-year-old daughter can understand that. She noticed some time ago that some of the poorest children in the country school she goes to are also the stupidest. And she saw at once that they are stupid because they are poor, because they don't have the kind of food that makes energy, because their parents haven't the time or the ability to help them, because they are worried and harassed.

If she can get that, why can't we? Is it because she has imagination enough to put herself in the place of these children and visualize what their lives must be like?

If our imaginations weren't atrophied, we would see the docile poor not only as an occasion for pity but also as a challenge to our common sense and our patriotism. For the deterioration of these human beings, quite apart from its tragic aspects, represents an incalculable waste. A manufacturer knows well enough how to estimate the economic value of a man, but we do not bother to calculate social value. Only the most shiftless of farmers would leave a diseased herd of cows untended or would permit his horses to starve, but we make no attempt to check the decay of human resources.

All the statistics about undernourishment, bad housing, and unnecessary disease represent personal tragedies. They also represent social waste. Here is a manufacturer. Nearly a quarter of his machinery is not in use, and he is allowing it to

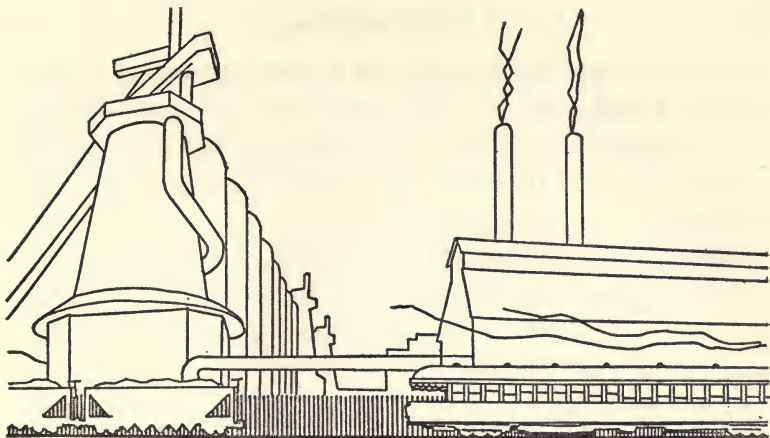
be destroyed by rust. Another quarter is in operation, but it is not being properly tended to, and it will wear out much sooner than is necessary. The remainder is more or less adequately looked after, though, as a matter of fact, only a small proportion is treated in accordance with the most advanced technological knowledge. The manufacturer is obviously a disgrace to a land that prides itself on its efficiency.

Human beings, however, aren't machines. They don't, as a rule, just let themselves lapse into uselessness. It is very often pointed out, by apologists for our present way of doing things, that many of the poor are healthy and many are happy. It is true. More than that, most of them have not slumped into good-natured hopelessness or sullen despair. I know a foundryman who is a serious Socialist and a careful student of Karl Marx, an electrical worker who devotes four or five nights a week to the union in which he is a minor official, a collar factory operative who attends classes at the Y.W.C.A., a boy who digs ditches on a W.P.A. project in the daytime and writes poetry at night.

The courage of the working class is one of the things that make me like America, but at the same time it makes me realize with what fatuous irresponsibility we are squandering our human resources. Instead of these men and women having the best possible chance to develop their talents, their lives are so difficult that many of them are beaten into dullness and most fall far short of their potentialities.

We used to be reckless in our waste of our natural resources, but we have begun to learn better, and we regret the thoughtlessness of our ancestors. Our children will regret and condemn and marvel at our indifference to human waste.

You may have noticed that every few days there is an item in the papers about somebody's committing suicide because he didn't have a job or a home and was hungry and desperate. Occasionally a man kills himself and his wife and children too. Well, that's one choice, but what will our descendants think of a society that made it a reasonable alternative?



## V. Nobody Starves—Much

NOT FAR from here there is an industrial town, chiefly concerned with the manufacture of textiles, a town of about twenty thousand inhabitants. Last November, when the President's unemployment census was being made, the local newspaper announced that fifteen hundred cards had been returned. Then it said that this figure was merely an estimate and that there were nearer two thousand cards. Finally it was stated that more than twenty-five hundred persons had registered.

Textile factories employ a great many women, and it is possible that half of the town's population work for wages when they can. Even so, that means that, a month before Christmas, at least one-quarter of the workers had no jobs. And since women are paid twelve or thirteen dollars a week,

and since, except for a small and rapidly decreasing number of skilled workmen, men are paid under twenty dollars, you can't suppose that the average family had saved much. And perhaps you can imagine what kind of Christmas the children had.

When I was in Pittsburgh last October, I saw with my own eyes that some of the big steel mills were working with skeleton crews. That was near the beginning of the "recession," and people were still talking with bewilderment of what was happening. Two thousand laid off in this mill, three thousand in that, and nobody knew when they would go back to work.

Perhaps we needed this "recession" to remind us that unemployment is a permanent fact in American life. In 1927, during the boom, the United States Bureau of Statistics estimated that there were four million unemployed. President Hoover's Committee on Recent Economic Changes calculated that there were two million out of work, exclusive of farm laborers.

This was when we thought we were prosperous. "But," you may say, "these people obviously didn't want to work. Surely they could have got jobs in 1927." President Hoover's committee doesn't agree with you. It believes that, for the most part, these people couldn't get work that they could do. Even while many industries were prospering, others were lagging behind. New England textiles, for instance, were having a depression of their own before the stock market crashed.

Then there was what we learned to call technological unemployment. When a labor-saving device is introduced, men are thrown out of work. The optimists say that the labor-saving device lowers prices, which increases demand, and thus



more people are given jobs. That is sometimes — by no means always — true. But even when it is true, the new jobs are not sure to go to the people who were thrown out of work in the first place.

In 1929 Isador Lubin, now Commissioner of Labor Statistics, made a study of a large number of representative cases. About one worker out of every twenty found a job within a month after being discharged. About five out of every twenty found jobs within three months. Some forty-five percent had been unemployed for longer periods and had not found jobs at the time Mr. Lubin made his study. Among these were the older men, many of whom, it seemed certain, would never be able to get work again. Most of the re-employed were working in industries quite different from those they had formerly been in — and at lower pay.

This was in 1929. What happened in the next year is familiar to everyone. In 1931 Mr. Hoover's Secretary of Commerce, Robert P. Lamont, estimated that there were six million unemployed. The American Federation of Labor said seven million and a half. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company reported to the President's Emergency Unemployment Committee that in forty-three cities nearly one worker out of every four was idle.

Nobody knows how bad unemployment was at the bottom of the depression. The lowest estimate was twelve million. The Labor Research Association, after a careful study of all available figures, asserted that there were more than sixteen million totally unemployed and that another eleven million were working only from one to three days a week.

You remember 1932 and 1933. You remember the apple-

sellers in Times Square, the breadlines that stretched for blocks, the shivering figures on the steps of subway stations, the Hooverville in Central Park. And even if, as I am assuming, you were lucky enough to keep your position all through the depression, you probably had less fortunate friends. What happened to Frank Martin? Oh, he and Mary had to give up their apartment. He went to his family and she to hers. And the Stevenses had to take in Helen's brother and his wife, with whom they always fought. You've lost track of Arthur Morton: he went on relief, finally, and he'd be ashamed to speak to you if he met you on the street.

Unemployment in the depression was not something that happened to a group of strangers who could be dismissed as incompetents. It happened to your friends and mine — good men, capable, honest, willing. Probably every second man you see on the street has, during the past eight years, been jobless for a longer or shorter period.

And this is not something we can dismiss as ancient history. Even in the cheerful days of early 1937, when steel was booming and stocks were going up and dividends were rising, we knew that the problem of unemployment had not been solved. Even then the American Federation of Labor estimated that there were ten million unemployed, and Harry Hopkins warned us that from five to seven and a half million would remain jobless.

The explanation is easy to find. A year ago production was almost as high as it had been at the peak of the boom, and yet there were two or three times as many unemployed as there were in 1929. In 1933 Stuart Chase wrote: "I think we are reasonably safe in concluding that no more than seventy-

one man, working not more than forty-three hours a week, can now produce as much manufactured goods as one hundred men working fifty hours a week did in the period from 1923 to 1925.”

That was in 1933. In the past five years the output per hour of each industrial worker has again increased. Unless the people of the United States are able to consume more goods than they consumed in 1929, there is bound to be permanent unemployment.

That was the lesson we learned during the period of so-called recovery. And now the so-called recession is teaching us another. Last November, when the unemployment census was taken, nearly eight million persons registered as totally unemployed. John D. Biggers, director of the census, estimated, on the basis of a house to house canvass, that only seventy-two percent of the jobless mailed their postcards. That means that the true figure is nearer eleven million. And, in the period since the census, unemployment has been increasing at the rate of at least half a million a month. Apparently the recovery didn't take.



What happens to the millions without jobs? "It's very sad," you say, "but at least they don't starve. There's always relief."

It's a comforting thought, but —

When the depression began, American political and industrial leaders were completely unprepared. In the optimistic days of the boom nobody had dreamed of such a calamity. There might be a little drop in employment, but nothing alarming. And when the depression became really serious, these leaders couldn't believe their eyes. They couldn't believe, for example, that forty percent of Chicago's workers were, in 1931, jobless. They couldn't understand what it meant that, although these workers had been earning a total of two million a day, Chicago had only one hundred thousand dollars a day to spend on relief.

The figures that rolled in from different parts of the nation were terrifying. In Pennsylvania there were over a million unemployed, and whatever resources they had once had were exhausted. A Philadelphia relief committee set aside some money to be used for loans to those people whose pride would not let them appeal to the charities. The 3,200 persons who applied had, on the average, been jobless for eight months. They had used up all their savings, amounting to \$700,000, and were more than a million dollars in debt.

In 1930 and 1931 unemployment relief was handled as it always had been — by private charities, and by cities, counties, or townships. President Hoover tried to meet the emergency by appealing to private charity, and his committee, with the aid of high-pressure advertising, raised huge sums, but the need grew more rapidly than the funds. By the end of



1932, despite the fact that the Reconstruction Finance Corporation had lent three hundred millions to the states, it was no longer enough to talk about malnutrition. The old-fashioned word had to be used: people were starving!

And city governments, carrying the burden of relief with greatly reduced incomes, were abandoning all the standards that had been built up through years of struggle. New York City lopped nineteen percent off school funds, fifteen percent off health and sanitation, twenty-seven percent off parks and recreation. Detroit cut its police and fire departments and reduced its health service. In Alabama, schools averaged only one-third of the usual term. Millions of dollars — more than forty millions by the end of 1933 — were owed school teachers, and there were two hundred thousand teachers among the unemployed. Public hospitals, even with beds in the corridors, were turning patients away.

In August, 1932, a study was made of South Bend, Indiana. Out of every five workers in the community, two had no jobs and two were working only part time. The typical family income, from all sources, was \$45 a month. One-tenth of the families investigated had received no income from any source during the preceding thirty days.

If you will look at those figures and think about them, you will understand why officials were wiring Washington in terms not unlike Mayor Cermak's: "If I cannot have funds for relief, I cannot answer for law and order."

That is the background of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, created by Congress after Roosevelt became President. What did the F.E.R.A. do? Before it came into existence, the average family on relief, regardless of size, was



getting \$15.59 a month. The F.E.R.A. raised the average to \$29.44. Not a staggering amount. Not an amount that allows for many luxuries. Not an amount, as far as that goes, that takes care of the necessities. But the fact remains that the F.E.R.A. nearly doubled the average relief allowance throughout the country. And in some states it trebled or quadrupled the average. In Georgia the increase was from \$4.38 to \$17.16; in New Mexico from \$3.98 to \$12.32; in Mississippi from \$3.86 to \$15.23. It seems incredible that any state could have expected \$3.86 to keep a family alive for a month, but it's true. The sum of \$15.23 is little enough, but it's a lot better than that.

The F.E.R.A. lasted about two years. In January, 1935, President Roosevelt said: "The federal government must and shall quit this business of relief." In April, Congress authorized the setting up of the Works Progress Administration. In June, the F.E.R.A. began to curtail its activities, and by the beginning of the next winter the "unemployables" had been handed back to the cities and states and the local charities.

The principle of work relief is sound. It is better for the community and better for the unemployed. But the immediate result of the giving up of the F.E.R.A. was just such a collapse as had taken place in 1931. In a book called *They Shall Not Want*, Maxine Davis quotes from Chicago papers of the summer of 1936. Under a picture of two dismal children she read: "Mrs. Mary Maloney's children, Eileen, two, and William, four, who were evicted from their home Sunday night when she was unable to pay the rent. They took shelter in a parked car that night and in a hallway Monday night."

She read: "Mrs. Charles Nelson, aged seventy-one, walked

twenty blocks to the downtown office of the United Charities when her landlord notified her that she and her sick husband would have to leave their room at 222 Wisconsin Street. The old couple have received only two grocery orders, each amounting to \$4.03, in more than a month."

She read about the tortures of "an incurable cancer patient whose medicines were discontinued by the public agency." About six children who were "camping in the backyard of a tenement from which they were evicted Monday." About a client who "tried to commit suicide when he heard that there was no prospect of the situation improving." She read: "Since August 15 the public agency has discontinued all relief except an inadequate supply of food to families who were known to it in June. For two months it has taken no new cases."

What had happened? The government policy of handing the unemployables back to local authorities had overwhelmed Chicago's relief system. For one thing, the W.P.A. had taken on only a little more than half of the clients certified by the relief agency as able to work. For another, the number of the unemployables had increased, and the difficulties of getting funds had grown no smaller. With the state, the county, and the city all involved, there were financial complications and problems of authority. Administrative staffs had been reduced, and it was impossible to handle cases efficiently. "Production," as relief workers significantly call the closing of cases, had stopped.

The 1936 collapse of relief in Chicago was paralleled in communities all over the country. In Atlanta social workers visited ninety-five families that had been removed from the relief rolls. Only ten reported that they were getting three

meals a day. Thirty-one said they averaged two meals, and thirty had had four or five meals in the preceding three days. Sixteen families were averaging one meal a day, and two had had only two meals in the past three days. "Meals" consisted mostly of vegetables such as cabbage, greens, and peas. Some had eaten only pea pods and meat scraps from the refuse of curb markets.

The American Association of Social Workers spoke of "the pitiful and horrible situations" that developed after the suspension of the F.E.R.A. "Families of five and six members are required to exist on relief allowances of \$2.25 for a two-week period in one southern city, while all able-bodied applicants for relief ineligible for W.P.A. assignment are being refused any relief in Texas cities."

Gradually the administration of relief was stabilized, but on a low level. In Troy, New York, families with two or three children are given nothing but a three-dollar-a-week food order, a quarter of a ton of coal every fortnight, and an occasional can of corned beef or of some vegetable from the federal surplus commodities. Until a few weeks ago a single man on relief was given a check for his room rent and a meal ticket, good in certain restaurants, amounting to three dollars a week. This winter the amount of the meal ticket was reduced to \$1.75. According to welfare officials, "Some of the single men on relief have been unappreciative of the help given them, and a few have been known to exchange their meal tickets for money and liquor." So single men are now allowed twenty-five cents a day for restaurant meals!

This is in a medium-sized upstate city. In New York City a person seeking relief goes to the intake office of the Depart-

ment of Public Welfare. He is required to prove residence for two years, and, if he cannot do this, his application is immediately thrown out. If his statements indicate that he is entitled to relief, the application goes to the investigating department. Not only are all his statements checked, but his relatives are investigated. If he has an insurance policy, all but a small part of it must be canceled. If a woman is separated from her husband, she must request the Missing Persons Bureau to search for him, or, if she knows where he is, must swear out a warrant for non-support. Because of the various preliminaries, it is usually a month before relief begins.

If the applicant has just lost his job, he is told to wait a month, to see if something won't turn up. If he gets through the month without too much trouble, he is suspected of having hidden resources, and there is a further delay while a more detailed investigation is made.

When, at last, the applicant is put on the relief rolls, the care that he receives is, relatively speaking, generous. It is true that he and his family will have to live in the worst of sub-standard dwellings, and it is only recently that the Department of Public Welfare and the Emergency Relief Bureau, which previously had charge of relief, have insisted on the enforcement of housing laws. But he has shelter; he has light and heat; he has medical attention; and he has food.

Last summer the Emergency Relief Bureau was allowing \$8.05 a week for food for a family of five. Miss Pauline Murrah, nutritionist of the Health Department, worked out a diet that would permit such a family to get the proper number of calories for that amount. More generous than the emergency diet, her program called for a pound of stewing lamb, a



pound and a half of chopped meat, a pound and a half of liver, beef, pork, or lamb (at twenty-five cents a pound, summer of 1937 prices), and a dozen and a half of eggs (at twenty-nine cents a dozen). It provided for ten pounds of green vegetables, and it allowed twenty-two cents a week for fresh fruit.

When Miss Murrah's diet was published, the critics protested. Many said that three young children could not thrive on such a diet. Others insisted that prices were higher than the diet indicated. Miss Murrah defended herself: "We are trying to be realistic. There are thousands of families in New York living on eight dollars a week and we are merely trying to show how best to use that amount. Therefore we suggest more milk and vegetables instead of meat."

Half a million children — almost one-third of all the children in New York City — are growing up in families on relief. A family on relief, according to Mayor La Guardia's board of survey, falls forty percent below a maintenance standard of living and from fifteen to twenty-five percent below an emergency standard. And relief in New York City has just been cut ten percent.

Yet New York City does more for its unemployed than any other city in the country. A year ago, after relief had been stabilized, the American Association of Social Workers made a study of conditions in twenty-eight areas. In many communities they found that the authorities refused to do anything for a family that had an employable member. Families of men who could work, the authorities said, were the responsibility of the federal government, and if no W.P.A. jobs were available it was just too bad.

The survey showed that relief was becoming more and more difficult to obtain and less and less adequate. In Columbia,



S. C., for example, the monthly food average was \$7.96, with some assistance from surplus food commodities and clothing. In Texas, where there were 140,000 employable persons in need of relief, there were only 80,000 W.P.A. jobs, and almost no facilities for taking care of the other 60,000. In Colorado Springs there was no cash relief, but only inadequate food orders, supplemented in some cases with coal and rent. In Arkansas \$12 a month per family was the absolute maximum, and many parents were deserting their children so that they might be placed in institutions. In one county of Kansas there was virtually no relief except the distribution of federal surplus commodities.

In March, 1938, the American Association of Social Workers reported on another investigation: "Malnutrition common among relief families throughout the country. Children kept from school because of lack of clothing. . . . Wholesale evictions of relief families in communities where relief agencies are unable to pay rents. . . . Low-paid jobs in private industries forcing full-time workers to seek supplemental aid." In Chicago, out of one hundred men on relief, seventy-two had no overcoats, seven had no kind of jacket, forty had bad shoes, and ten were without underwear of any kind.

That is what happened to persons who couldn't get on the W.P.A., which has never been able to take care of all those who needed and wanted work. The W.P.A. rolls reached their highest point in March, 1936, when they carried nearly three million names. By August, 1937, this number had been cut almost in half.

Only mothers-in-law have figured more frequently than the W.P.A. in newspaper cartoons. We not only read and hear all sorts of stories about absurd and extravagant projects; most of

us have seen men leaning on shovels, sluggishly pushing wheelbarrows, standing about in lethargic groups.

Are the men to blame? Unfortunately the W.P.A. workers we see are, for the most part, the ones who are employed on ill-conceived projects, invented by some politician with an axe to grind. The workers do not like them any better than we do. Even standing about with a shovel is not a pleasure in freezing weather.

And the truth really is that, in spite of whatever boondoggling there may be, the W.P.A. has an impressive record. In two years these much abused loafers managed to erect 11,106 public buildings and repair 30,542 others. They built 43,870 and improved 146,901 miles of road. They built 19,272 bridges, 3,865 miles of water mains, 3,330 storage dams, and 5,692 miles of sewers. They made over 100,000,000 articles of clothing for the unemployed, and served 128,000,000 luncheons to undernourished school children. They held classes attended by millions of persons. They brought plays to an audience of a million every month, and music to an audience of three million. They produced 116 books and pamphlets. They have made life pleasanter for most Americans, and they have stimulated what amounts to a renaissance in the arts.

These are facts for us to think about the next time the editor of the local newspaper grows facetious at the expense of the W.P.A. But our concern at the moment is with the W.P.A. as a method of relief. Its rates vary from \$19 a month for unskilled workers in the far South to \$95 a month for professional services in New York City. No W.P.A. worker receives more than \$22 a week, and the average for the country is little better than \$10. In five southern states the average is less than \$20 a month. In other words, the majority of W.P.A. families

— though they are much better off than the majority of families on relief—cannot enjoy the emergency budget that, though it will not permanently sustain health, does keep you alive.

We have seen what America has done for its jobless during eight years of depression. For three years the burden was carried by private charities and local governments, and the result was incalculable suffering. The federal government then took a hand, and made it possible for the average family on relief to have about seven dollars a week. With the abandoning of the F.E.R.A., standards sank for millions who could not get on the W.P.A., and even the fortunate ones averaged only ten dollars a week or a little more.

We need to review this history because most of us have rather absurd notions about relief. If this is the best that can be done for our unemployed, then they will have to grin and bear it, but let us at least stop talking about pampered idlers. Our sneering editors, who print daily jibes at boondogglers and relief-chiselers, might well be made to learn what they are talking about. I would not condemn even the cheapest sneerer of the lot to a family allowance of \$7.96 a month, but I should like to see the whole crew forced to get along on the \$22 a week that is the W.P.A. maximum.

We need to look at relief facts realistically because the problem is once more becoming urgent. Of the men and women who had jobs a year ago nearly three million are today idle. Until the special appropriation of \$250,000,000 was voted by Congress, the W.P.A. was being forced to lay men off in a period of crisis. The Social Security Act only slightly alleviates the situation. The burden rests once more on the community.

In Wabash, Indiana, fifteen persons were found last January in a shed. Arthur Correll was unable to get work, and he

and his wife and their ten children took refuge there. They were joined by the Corrells' married daughter, whose husband, Frank Burdine, was also jobless. On January 4, Mrs. Burdine, with no medical attendance, gave birth to a child. Three weeks later the baby was smothered to death in one of the two beds in which the four adults and the eleven children were sleeping.

Last summer thousands of people migrated from the Texas and Oklahoma dust bowl to California to try to find work. When the harvest ended, they set up little villages of tents and shacks, for they were not eligible for relief. Last December a doctor visited them. In one camp he found twenty-seven out of thirty children suffering from diseases caused by malnutrition; in another twenty-one out of twenty-two.

Occasionally the know-it-all editors talk as if they thought those of us who are in favor of decent relief like unemployment. We don't. We know better than they what it costs, because they count cost only in terms of their personal losses through the taxes they pay, whereas we count cost in terms of social waste. The unemployed have — or at least they had — something to give society, even if nothing more than brute strength. Many of them were skilled workmen, and for months, or even years, society has been deprived of that skill, which now, perhaps, is lost forever. Think of what they could have produced, these millions, for all of us to use.

We want, more than anything else, to see unemployment ended forever, but, so long as it endures, we are determined that the whole of society shall share the burden. And this means not only justice for the unemployed, who are the victims of the way our economic machine functions; it means also the reduction, as far as possible, of the loss to society. If men and women cannot find employment in the normal way,



then let us give them something to do. Let us protect their health, so that they will preserve their capacity to work, so that the health of the whole community can be guarded, so that the future will not be cursed with the crooked bodies and minds that are the toll of malnutrition. Let us protect their pride instead of subjecting them to pauper's oaths and official brutality.

We talk proudly of the American family, but allow unemployment to destroy it. Husbands and wives separate. Children are taken by more fortunate relatives or placed in institutions. Boys, weary of the poverty at home and unable to get jobs, take to the road.

The Family Welfare Association made a study of the unemployed in 1934. "What do you do with your time?" the investigator asked. "I wander around most of the day," one said, "inquiring for a job. I sit around awhile at night, trying to decide what to do. I can't decide, so I go to bed usually." "I don't even think," said another. "I get too depressed. My wife tries to make over old clothes." A third said, "We listened to the radio until the electricity was turned off."

You can't brush these people aside. "Oh," you say, "I know a man who was offered a good job and he wouldn't take it. He preferred to stay on relief. Relief may be as bad as you paint it, but I guess it seems a lot better than work to most of those bums."

Do you know why that man chose to stay on relief? The chances are it was because the job he was offered was insecure and he knew it would take him weeks and perhaps months to get back on relief once he was off the rolls.

I know a man. He was getting fourteen dollars a week on the W.P.A. (He has a family of five boys.) He was offered a



job working a twelve-hour shift in a lunch cart, for eighteen dollars. He took it, and gladly.

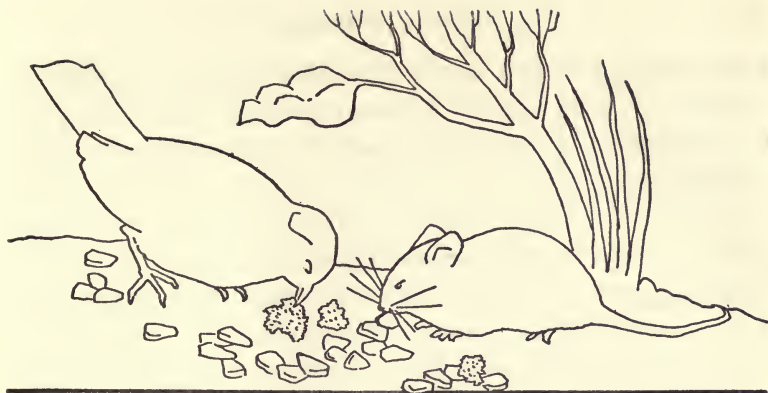
You hear plenty of stories about refused jobs, and yet investigations have found few examples. In Buffalo, 262 cases were studied, and only eight men were found to have turned down jobs that, by the standards of hard-boiled relief workers, they ought to have taken. In Washington, out of 16,000 persons on relief, 220 were charged with rejecting jobs. Investigations showed that only four had refused reasonable offers. A relief administrator in Ohio asked 12,000 persons whether they would prefer work relief or home relief; 11,997 said they wanted work relief, and two of the remaining three thought home relief preferable only because it gave more time to look for jobs.

The persons who know the unemployed best will tell you that they are pitifully eager for jobs — except the few whose spirits have been broken by years of joblessness. And I don't think you and I ought to be too hard on them.

The giving of relief is unsatisfactory from every point of view. The recipient hates it because it hurts his pride, because what he wants is a job, because what he gets is so inadequate. We don't like it because we have to contribute to its cost and because we would like to see the unemployed at work producing goods that we and they could use.

But so long as unemployment persists, we have to relieve the distress, just as we would help the victims of a flood or an earthquake.

Most Americans would agree to that. We are not a mean or pitiless people. But somehow a lot of us have got the idea that we are doing very well by the unemployed, perhaps a little too well. It is time we learned just how wrong we are.



## VI. Enough for Everybody

AGAIN the weather has changed. The other morning I looked out the window to find that the snow had gone and that there was a good-sized pond at the end of the garden. But the warm spell did not last, and, as the thermometer dropped, there was a little snow, a damp sticky snow. It clung not only to every branch but to every twig and every blade of grass. And now the clear, bright sun of a cold morning glitters from the drooping stalks. The chickadees and jays and woodpeckers are busy at the crumbs and the suet, and they have brought with them a pair of tree sparrows and a solitary nuthatch. On the ground a pair of plump field mice are making bolder and bolder raids from their hiding places in the wall.

Beauty, we say, is in the eye of the beholder, and I cannot help thinking, this cold morning, that that is true in a way that we don't usually realize. I can appreciate the beauty of

this scene as I sit here in my pleasant study. I will appreciate it when, warmly dressed, I go out to chop wood. But would I appreciate it if I were shivering, if I were hungry, if I were sick and worried?

My love of this spot and of the little slice of America I have described is not merely a matter of natural beauty. The natural beauty is there, but there is also something in me. America has given me privileges, opportunities, a pleasant way of life. Its beauties are mine because I have the chance to appreciate them.

A while ago some association of businessmen plastered up on the billboards of the country a series of advertisements. I remember one in particular. It showed a workman and his family having a picnic by a beautiful brook. They were well-dressed; their lunch baskets were heaping full; their automobile stood in the background. There was a caption about the American standard of living.

If only this were a true picture of the American standard of living! How far it is from the truth we now know. We have faced the facts about housing, wages, diet, medical care, relief. We know that the great majority of the American people would look upon that poster with envy and despair, for not more than one American out of three can have the good things it portrays.

While we have been examining these facts, I haven't said much about liking America. They make me feel as if I ought to say, "I personally am having a pretty good time," or, "I have no kick to make," or, "On purely selfish grounds I find America O.K." They don't seem to encourage such a sweeping statement as "I like America." They rob that statement of its meaning, reducing it to an affirmation of the personal enjoyment of special privileges.

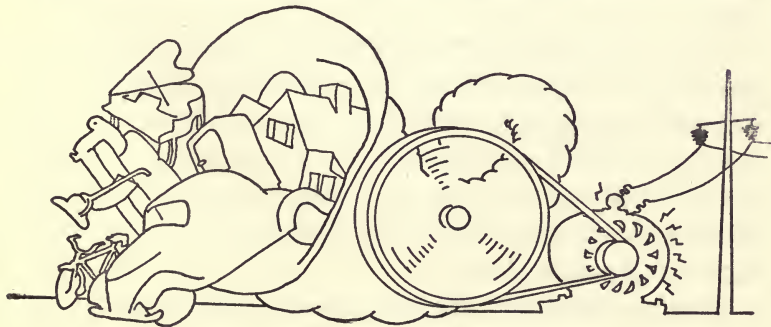
And that, I am afraid, is what a great many people mean when they say, "I like America." They don't like America, not the America that we have been looking at. They like a special America of their own, in which they get preferred treatment.

Nevertheless, I maintain that one can look at these facts without having to say, "I don't like America." I admit that a case could pretty easily be made for not liking America. One could say: "I don't like America. Nearly half its people aren't decently housed. A third have to go short on food. A quarter are in actual want. There are millions of jobless, and most of these have to get along on miserable sums. How can you like a country in which such things happen?"

Well, you can. I insist that America is all right. Because our boasted American standard of living, though far from being a fact, is a possibility. I don't despair when I think of the ten million families in want, because I know that they don't have to be. I know that there can be enough for everybody, and I believe there will be.

We have been looking at one set of facts. Now let's look at another.

A few years ago a conservative research organization, the





Brookings Institution, set out to discover how much the United States was able to produce. They studied the years from 1925 to 1929, when production was at its height. They weren't interested in how much could be turned out under ideal conditions, but what could be done in actual practice. They made allowances for shut-downs for repairs, cleaning, installation of machinery, and the like. They did not figure on continuous operation unless the plants in question were in the habit of working continuously. They took into account seasonal variations, the problem of obsolete equipment, the likelihood of interruptions. In short, they "endeavored to arrive at capacity estimates that are attainable under the practical operating conditions which exist."

What did they find out? How close did our productive organization come, at the peak of the boom, to turning out the goods it could reasonably be expected to turn out? These researchers decided, after making all the allowances they could think of, that production in 1925-1929 was about eighty percent of potential capacity. Then, just in the interests of scholarly caution, they lopped off five percent. In this way they reached a figure of fifteen percent below capacity. In other words, nineteen percent more goods could have been produced.

That doesn't sound like much, does it? But it means that America could have added to its production fifteen billion dollars' worth of goods. And this amount, if distributed to the families that had less than \$2,000 a year in 1929, would have brought them up to that level. More than sixteen million families needn't have been deprived of proper food, proper homes, and proper clothes.

This is a way of saying that we have the power in our hands



to abolish poverty. Simply by raising the national income to what it perfectly well might be, we could give all the underprivileged at least a decent standard of living. The factories are there, the farms, the railroads, the coal mines, the oil fields. All we have to do is set them to work.

That is good news, startling news. But the whole truth is even more startling. In 1934, the National Survey of Potential Product Capacity, which was set up by the Civil Works Administration, started out to study not merely the productive capacity of existing plants but the whole process by which raw materials are turned into goods for us consumers.

The survey asked what could be produced. It also asked what the American people needed. In the matter of food, for example, it took the Department of Agriculture's "liberal" diet. It took the habits of comfortably well-off professional people as its standard for clothing. It assumed that every American would like to live in a five or six room house or apartment with modern conveniences. It consulted medical authorities to find out about the need for doctors' and dentists' services, and educational authorities to discover the need for schools and colleges. It studied the taste of the people in the matter of recreation.

The survey disregarded what are called "scarcity values," that is, goods that are expensive merely because they are rare — works of art, for example. It took into account simply what might be called reasonable desires. On this basis it figured out a budget for the country. Thus it was able to answer the question, "What do Americans want?" as well as the question, "What can they have?" and therefore the question, "Can we have what we want?"

If we are going to study productive capacity, we start, of

course, with raw materials, for, if there is a shortage there, we are stopped. But the survey shows that, in most respects, America is adequately provided with raw materials and that it can import what it does not have, since it can readily produce goods to exchange for what little it needs from abroad.

Let us see how matters stand with regard to food. We know that American farmers did not produce enough in 1929 to give us all a liberal diet. But could they have? Most farmers could, relatively easily, produce more than they do, and would if they could sell it. For instance, farm production went up between 1921 and 1926, when there was an active demand, and it went up without any increase in acreage and with a decrease in the labor force. Moreover, we have not begun to test the possibilities of science in agriculture. Except for the few things we have to import, our American farms are more than able to supply our needs.

What about fuels? There is plenty of coal and iron in the earth, and plenty of equipment with which to open new mines and drill new wells. The supply, so far as estimates can tell, will last for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years, and it will always be possible to supplement it with electricity from water power and with alcohol, which can be made synthetically from vegetable growths.

What about minerals? So far as the more important minerals are concerned, our existing capacity is adequate. Nickel, tin, and various rarer metals we can import — since we can produce other things in excess of our own needs that we can exchange for them.

The only serious shortage that the survey found in consid-

ering raw materials was in forest products. For a long time the annual consumption of wood has exceeded the annual growth, and at the present rate the forests might be exhausted in as little as thirty years. But there are substitutes that could be used until reforestation projects had restored the supply.

*The Chart of Plenty*, the report of the survey, sums up this way: "Our study of the supply and availability of raw materials indicated that, with the exception of forest products, the consumption requirements of the American people could be fully met in every category if physical factors were the only limit on production."

But of course it is not enough to talk about raw materials. How about our ability to turn them into goods we want?

Some materials are prepared by a single process — many foods, for example, and some fuels. Other materials go through many stages. The survey studied all these different processes. It found that food-processing plants, textile mills, and cement mills were not working, even in 1929, at anything like their capacity. Blast furnaces and steel mills could have turned out enough more than they did to satisfy the needs of America.

So it goes. Bakeries and sugar mills, as equipped today, can give us all we want and more. There could be a motorcar for every family in the country. A housing program could be undertaken that in five or ten years would do away with all the shacks and all the slum tenements.

So far as services are concerned, we are equally well off. Some three thousand dentists are needed and would have to be trained, but there are probably enough doctors if they were properly distributed and their time fully utilized. Educational needs would require the building of many schools and

the training of many teachers, but we have the resources to make both things possible.

And there is no shortage of labor. Even in 1929, you remember, there were some four million unemployed. But the significant fact is that the productivity of the industrial worker has been increasing rapidly, and there is no reason to doubt that it will continue to increase.

The National Survey of Potential Product Capacity concluded that America could produce enough to take care of all the reasonable demands of all its people. It has the raw materials or it could get them. It has most of the equipment needed to convert the raw materials into consumers' goods, and it could create whatever it lacks. It has an adequate labor force.

This means that every American family could have as much in the way of goods and services as a family with an income of \$4,370 could have secured in 1929. All Americans could have what only one in ten has today!

I am not an economist. I do not know whether the figures in *The Chart of Plenty* are accurate or not. But I do know, as everyone does, that for the last eight years America has been producing only a fraction of what she could produce. I know that even the conservative Brookings Institution estimates capacity during the boom as nineteen percent higher than actual production. Common sense tells me that, whether \$4,370 is too high or too low, poverty could be abolished.

We hear a lot about the industrial revolution, but we don't seem to realize just how revolutionary it was. There was a time when poverty was inevitable. Somebody had to do without because there wasn't enough produced to go round. But power-driven machinery has incredibly multiplied our



productive powers. In the very beginning of the industrial revolution, for example, the use of steam in cotton manufacture enabled one worker to accomplish as much as two hundred hand workers had accomplished.

And the remarkable thing about the industrial revolution is that it still goes on. In 1869 — when it was already well under way — the average worker in manufacturing produced in a year goods worth \$2,670 (in 1913 prices). In 1932, he produced goods worth (at the same price level) \$8,885.

The productivity of the average factory worker, according to the Council for Industrial Progress, rose more than one hundred percent between 1914 and 1935. Senator Wagner points out that more units of goods are moved by one railway worker today than by two in 1910, that in 1928 two cement workers produced more than three in 1919, that two telephone workers can accomplish more now than three could in 1929.

According to *The Chart of Plenty*, "It would seem reasonable to conclude that mankind is on the threshold of a new era, an era in which its problem of material supplies will be dismissed from its central position, and the other problems of living will assume a dominant place. In other words, it would seem as if society is ready to produce and distribute food, clothing, shelter, etc., as automatically and easily as advanced civilizations today distribute water, and to concentrate its individual and collective genius on those vast unexplored fields which up till now have been surveyed only by favorably placed specialists."

That seems to me a sober and realistic statement, one that, if your faith in America has been waning, ought to restore it.

But, even though we are on the threshold of the age of plenty, the door is not likely to open automatically. Indeed, it seems more tightly closed than it did a little while ago. In the twenties some of us were ready to believe that we were going to pass easily and effortlessly through the welcoming portals. Eight years of depression have proved us wrong. What we were told would be an era of universal prosperity turned out to be an era of ghastly misery. The possibilities of plenty are still there, but millions and millions of families can tell us that plenty is no reality.

If we want to bring in the age of abundance, we are going to have to work for it. We cannot produce plenty unless we can distribute it. The National Survey of Potential Product Capacity says: "Our study shows that 4,370 (1929) dollars of buying power must be given all families in order to command the full production of our existing plant." If it is true to say that we can produce enough for everybody, it is also true to say that we must distribute enough to everybody in order to permit our national economy to function efficiently.

It will take some doing, but we cannot shirk the task. Poverty, after all these thousands of years, is now one of the evils about which something can be done. Not merely Tom Smith's poverty or Frank Adams', but poverty. Charity, from the point of view of the giver, is fine and humane. Charity, from the point of view of the recipient, may be better than nothing. But charity is not enough. More important, it is not necessary. It is foolish, sentimental, un-American to talk about relieving poverty when we can abolish it.

There was a time when privileged persons could say, "Oh, well, somebody's got to be poor." We can't say that. Nobody

has to be poor. For us to acquiesce in poverty, to accept it, to do nothing about it, is like standing on the bank while a child drowns.

When you say, "I like America," do you mean, "I like poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance"? I'm afraid that, so far as practical results are concerned, that's just what you do mean unless you are trying to turn the America-that-is into the America-that-might-be. Might be, you understand, not in some far-off Utopia, but here and now. As an American I am glad that my country has enough for everybody. Now, as an American, I want to see that everybody gets enough.



## VII. A Home in the Rock

I WANT to be frank with you. When I think about the real land of plenty that we might have, I am not thinking only of the ten million families who are today living in poverty. I am thinking a little bit of myself.

There is one thing I haven't got. I have a home that I wouldn't exchange for a movie actor's palace. I have plenty of food. I have work that I like and time for recreation. But I lack — security. I have no confidence that ten years from now I will still be well-housed and well-fed. Ten years, one year, six months might see all this taken away from me.

I am conscious of insecurity because I have seen what can happen. Not long after I was born there was a depression. My father, after years of hard work, had risen to the superintendency of a small foundry. He was just beginning to feel that a long struggle had been won, for at last his salary was adequate to the needs of the family, and there was a growing savings account.



Then the depression came, and the foundry was closed. He was jobless long enough to eat up all the savings, and then finally he got a place — at much lower pay. The bitter years of petty economies and hard choices had begun all over again. He was employed as a clerk in an office, and he worked diligently. It never occurred to him to object if he had to work overtime. He was perfectly willing to do special work at home in the evening or even to go back to the factory after supper. It must have irritated him occasionally that the manual laborers got paid for overtime, whereas white collar workers were supposed to give gladly as many extra hours as the company demanded, but he did not complain. Skillful and conscientious, he rendered his employers the most faithful kind of service, and was duly grateful for each small raise in pay.

For twenty years he worked for the same company, and the small raises began to mount toward a moderately comfortable salary. With his children self-supporting, he was able to relax a little the discipline of economy and at the same time to save for the future. He could reasonably expect another working decade, and in that time he could, he hoped, accumulate enough to take care of my mother and himself for the remainder of their lives.

Then the company for which he worked was merged with others to form a large corporation, and the factory stopped operating. In appreciation of his years of unsparing work, my father was given a job in the storeroom, with the pay of a stock-boy. He took it, for, wherever else he went, he was told — it was still the era of prosperity — that he was too old. For as long as he could, he worked, for a miserable salary, at a job that not only was monotonous and distasteful but also

made physical demands to which he was not equal. He undermined his health, and then — was jobless again, in his fifties and in the first year of the depression.

I learned from that something about insecurity in the life of a white-collar worker. My father was proud of his white collar. It signified to him better education, higher social position, and security. Manual laborers were laid off for a day or a week or a month at a time when business was slack. He got his salary week in and week out. It was true that he worked many more hours than he was paid for, and that even on the average his pay did not equal that of the skilled workers, but his work had about it a certain dignity and a certain permanence. His employers counted on him, and he could count on them.

He found out that he was wrong. He did not blame his employers, for he could see there was nothing else for them to do. But that didn't help him.

The other day I heard a group of middle-class men and women talking about security. They were teachers, lawyers, businessmen, and their wives — a pretty good cross-section of the middle middle class. Only one person in the group was willing to say that he was economically secure, and the others made mincemeat of his arguments.

You can't imagine a discussion like that taking place ten years ago. In the winter of 1928-29 I did a little research work for a member of President Hoover's Committee on Recent Economic Changes. After a meeting of the Committee he said to me, with enthusiasm, "It's really true. Prosperity is going to last this time. We're building on a new foundation, and I don't see what can stop us. We ought to be able to go on indefinitely, steadily raising the standard of living."

You know what happened. On October 24, 1929, stocks suddenly crashed, nearly thirteen million shares being sold. A week later the stock exchange was closed for two days. By that time thousands of small investors had been ruined.

A friend of mine tells a story. His father, a moderately prosperous doctor, lost all his savings in the financial panic of 1907, and swore he would never play the market again. For more than ten years he kept his vow, but he was tempted by the post-war boom. One morning in 1921 he picked up his newspaper, read of the break in the market, and dropped dead of apoplexy. But recovery came promptly, and his stocks regained their value. As a result my friend, when he came of age a few years later, found himself in possession of a small capital. He went to New York and began playing the popular game. It was an easy game to play just then, and he doubled and redoubled his capital. Finally, one October morning, he found he was worth \$75,000. But a week later he was penniless.

I saw many long faces in October and November of 1929, but I remained cheerful, and so did others. Though the gambling mania had spread widely, there were plenty of people who stood to lose nothing from a mere decline in stocks. The newspapers published reassuring editorials: business was still sound; prosperity would return; the market would soar again.

But by December some people were getting worried. The Christmas business wasn't very good. Charities began to notice an increase in the number of applicants, among them "artists whose commissions for murals or paintings have been canceled, music teachers who have lost their pupils, architects with no houses to design, and upper servants who have been discharged by their suddenly impoverished employers." Police

departments reported more crimes rising directly from poverty.

Some iconoclasts called attention to the fact that industry had begun to slow down before the crash, and they predicted a serious depression. But they were scoffed at by the majority of politicians, business leaders, and newspaper editors. Secretary of Commerce Lamont talked about a "continuance" of prosperity. Other officials sturdily predicted a revival in the spring — until the passage of time made them change it to a revival in the autumn.

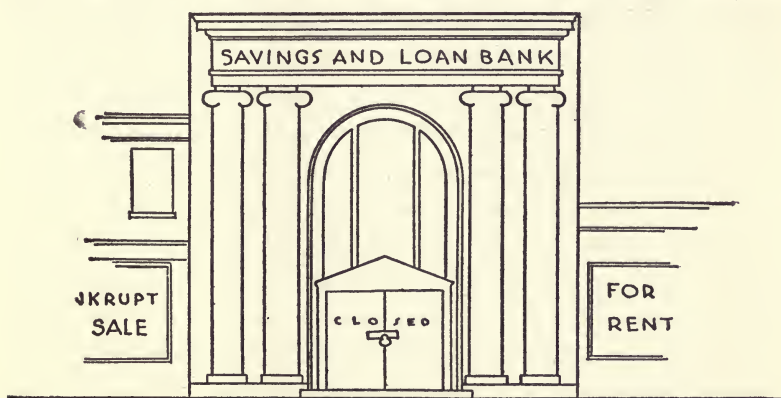
The autumn of 1930, however, brought only a further decrease in business activity, and the country settled down to a bitter winter. President Hoover refused to be disturbed. "Our problems," he said, "are the problems of growth. They are not the problems of decay. . . . The fundamental assets of the nation, the education, intelligence, virility, and the spiritual strength of our 120,000,000 people, have been unimpaired. . . . We know, in fact, that we have opened the door of a new social and economic system by which within our own borders we shall create the conquest of poverty. . . . I remain an unquenchable believer in the resistless, dynamic power of American enterprise. . . . The spirit of this people will never brook defeat."

Prices went steadily down — wheat, cotton, copper. Car loadings decreased. Steel manufacture was off twenty-seven percent, automobile manufacture forty percent. Payrolls were less than two-thirds of what they had been in 1925. In New York City several banks failed, notably the Bank of the United States. It was conservatively estimated that there were seven million unemployed. Suicides became common: not



of bankrupt gamblers leaping from skyscrapers, as in the autumn of 1929, but of jobless men forestalling starvation.

By the summer of 1931 the number of unemployed was put at ten million, and, reviewing the inadequacies of relief agencies, an editorial writer spoke of "next winter's starvation." Not without reason, for, with the winter less than half over, one relief bureau after another reported that it had no



funds. There was a hunger march on Washington, relief riots in many cities, demonstrations by homeless farmers. Ivar Kreuger committed suicide, and three men were shot outside Ford's River Rouge plant.

All through 1932, wages and salaries were steadily being cut. I had friends in Wall Street offices, in publishing houses, on newspaper staffs, who were given as many as five ten-percent cuts. As unemployment mounted to a figure of at least fifteen million, President Hoover proposed to cure the depression by sharing the work. Others saw a remedy in Tom Thumb golf.

In the summer of 1932 the Bonus Expeditionary Force was

driven out of Washington with tear gas and bullets. When Congress opened in November, a march of the jobless was met with a great show of military force. Organizations of the unemployed were formed, and there were demonstrations, often broken up by violence, in many cities. Farm strikes became more and more common, and farmers in a dozen states found ways of stopping mortgage sales.

Before President-elect Roosevelt came into office, it was clear that the banks of the country could not stand the strain. By March 3, bank holidays had been proclaimed in twenty-two states. New York and Chicago banks tried to meet the crisis but failed. There was nothing to do but close the banks. Fourteen hundred of them never reopened.

As you know, the depression did not spare the middle class. In 1930, 1931, and 1932, more than half a million professional men, shopkeepers, and small businessmen were forced to close their offices, stores, or factories. In the spring of 1933, 35 percent of all salaried workers were unemployed: 20 percent of teachers, 65 percent of chemists, 85 percent of engineers, 90 percent of architects and draftsmen. Those who were lucky enough to have jobs had, on the average, had their salaries cut by one quarter. Professional incomes were down as much as forty percent.

Relief rolls told the story. In New York City, in 1933, forty percent of applicants for relief belonged to what we call the middle class. So did one out of every five charity patients in the hospitals. They had lost their jobs. Their investments, if they had had any, had been wiped out by the stock market crash. Their savings had been exhausted or perhaps lost in bank failures. They had sold their homes, if they had happened to

own them, sold their cars, cashed in their insurance policies, pawned their valuables, moved to poorer quarters, discontinued the telephone, cut out the little luxuries, gone about with patched clothing and unfilled stomachs. And at last they were forced to swear to their destitution and accept an inadequate dole — if they could get it.

That is why so many persons in the middle class know that they are not secure. Even if they were lucky enough to get through the bad years with only a minimum of discomfort, they saw what happened to their friends. They saw men and women, through no fault of their own, reduced to destitution. They realized, unless they were uncommonly arrogant, that only good fortune had saved them from the same plight.

So long as we have depressions, how can we talk about security? For a hundred years and more we have had stoppages of production at fairly regular intervals. There was a panic in 1837, followed by a depression of several years' duration. The Mexican War brought a year or two of prosperity, but there was another drop in production, which yielded to the discovery of gold in California. The year 1857 brought the next panic. After the Civil War there were two or three years of great expansion, and then six years of depression. There was a depression in 1884 and 1885, a panic in 1893, another in 1907. The prosperity of wartime was followed by the brief recession of 1921. The era of plenty that began in 1922 ended, as we all know, in 1929.

"But," someone says, "we have always come out of our depressions." That can hardly console those who have lost their jobs, their savings, their homes. It took my father years to get back to the point he had reached in 1907, and, almost

as soon as he had reached that goal, the depression of 1929 ended his business career. That is the experience of millions of middle-class Americans. Recovery comes, but it comes too late for many, and for many more it comes only in time to permit the beginning of another struggle.

Depressions appear to be an integral part of the system according to which the goods we use are produced and distributed. We can see why when we study the way that system works. In even the most primitive economic order not everything that is produced can be immediately consumed. Something has to be set aside to aid in further production. Our system requires the setting aside of a great deal, for we use huge factories and complicated machines. Our way of seeing that materials are available for use in production is to give to certain individuals more income than they can possibly spend. Then we tell them that, if they use their surplus for the production of more machines — more goods for the production of goods — they will receive more profits, more surplus income.

Obviously there is no guarantee that the individuals will produce what the rest of us need, nor is there any way of maintaining a balance between production and consumption. When times are good, the profitmakers, no matter how extravagantly they live, have enormous surpluses to invest. Even persons with small incomes save what they can, in order to prepare for the future, and their savings go into the general funds invested in more production. Everyone is optimistic; old businesses are enlarged and new businesses started; production increases by scores of billions of dollars' worth of goods.



But the amount that is available to buy goods does not increase so fast. Indeed, wages and salaries rise rather slowly even in these periods of prosperity. For a time the purchasing power of the people may be increased by selling goods to them on the installment plan, but this cannot last. Consumption cannot keep up with the growth of production.

Moreover, as industrialism has developed, this situation has been aggravated. Today a large proportion of industry is engaged in making, not goods for consumers, but machines. These machines take the place of human labor. Therefore, in a boom period, when money in large amounts is being invested, a great deal of it is necessarily being used in a way that will sooner or later throw men out of jobs. And when men are out of work, they cannot buy goods.

Bit by bit, first at this point and then at that, it is realized that expansion cannot continue. Businessmen talk bravely about prosperity, and urge people to buy till it hurts, but at the same time they begin to cut down production. People lose their jobs, and purchasing power is still further reduced. Investors grow worried and start selling their stocks. The market collapses. Retrenchment begins on a large scale, followed by widespread unemployment and all the phenomena of a depression. Factories lie idle because no one can buy the goods they are capable of turning out, and therefore no profit can be made.

Everyone has remarked on the ridiculousness of a depression. In ancient times people starved because not enough food had been grown to feed them, or they went without clothes because there wasn't the machinery and the manpower to make them. But here in America for the past eight years there

has been plenty of raw material. There have been idle factories. There have been millions of men clamoring for work. And at the same time a third or even a half of the population has lacked the bare necessities of life.

It is true that every depression except this one has come to an end. Sooner or later rock bottom is reached. The surpluses accumulated by factories are exhausted, and they start operating again. Consumers who, in their fear, have bought only what was absolutely necessary find that they have to replace articles that have worn out. The new demand opens a few factories, and the men they put to work increase the demand. Slowly industry recovers.

But our industrial history shows that it has always taken more than this to turn a depression into a boom. Every time the slow process of natural recovery has been accelerated by some special kind of stimulus. Sometimes the stimulus has been a war, sometimes the opening of new territory, sometimes the promotion of a new kind of goods, such as automobiles or radios, for the consumer.

This is a curious phenomenon. If you remember *Through the Looking-Glass*, you may recall what the Red Queen told Alice: "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."

Apparently the development of business is very much the same. Once you have slumped into a depression, the only way you can get back to the point at which you were is to get some distance ahead of it.

It becomes almost a matter of faith. If the capitalist class believes it can make huge profits, it invests money and puts

people to work, and then it can make profits. Sooner or later, of course, the boom stops, but in the meantime profits are made and the living standard raised.

It reminds one of the dime stunt that was so popular a few years ago. You remember. You received a letter from someone, instructing you to send that person a dime and then copy the letter and send it to ten of your friends. Each of the friends, before writing to ten of his friends, would send you a dime, and you would make ninety cents. It was a perfectly good scheme so long as it worked, and it could work for a long time — but not forever.

And perhaps the expansion of the capitalist system cannot go on forever. Somewhere in the course of every recovery, as we have seen, there is a special incentive for the making of new machines. As a result, the millions of men who work at making machines — the workers in what are technically called the producer-goods industries — are employed. They become good consumers, and all the consumer-goods industries are stimulated. And that is prosperity.

But the result of every boom is to give greater importance to the industries that make machines, and our prosperity becomes more and more dependent on the employment of the men in these industries. That means, I am afraid, not only that recovery inevitably leads to depression but also that recovery becomes increasingly difficult. It takes a stronger and stronger stimulus to start the producer-goods industries going, and it is easy to imagine that some day we will not find a stimulus of the required strength.

Possibly that day has already come. The 1929 depression did not end with the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt.

The more generous administration of relief — though still inadequate, as we have seen — helped to reduce the amount of suffering. Consuming power was increased, and gradually the business curve rose. But in 1935 there were still from twelve to fourteen million unemployed, and in New York City 3,833 men applied for every one hundred office jobs that were open.

By the spring of 1937, however, we were optimistic. Although there were still eight or nine million unemployed, production was steadily rising, and, among many groups, the depression was something to be forgotten as quickly as possible. Yet Leo T. Crowley, chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, on May 12, 1937, warned bankers to be ready "when the business cycle begins its next downward slide."

It is to be hoped that the bankers listened to him, for within six months the slide had begun. The "recession," as it was called, was blamed by business on the government and on the labor unions. The labor movement, with considerably more justice, saw in it "a capital strike," a device on the part of big business to bring pressure on the administration. But, whatever the cause, it was an alarming phenomenon: a new depression was beginning before we had really recovered from the old one.

Conceivably we have entered a new stage in the history of American business. As depression follows depression, we may find ourselves emerging each time on a lower instead of a higher level. Perhaps not. Possibly by the time this book is in your hands some new factor — it might be a flood of war orders — will have started the machine going again. Many



economists, however, predict that the general course from now on will be downward.

One thing is certain: whether we have a real recovery or only a partial one, there will be another depression. How are you going to prepare for it? That is the question we all have to ask. If we can't see some way of being absolutely sure of weathering the next depression, we haven't security.

For myself, I haven't the least idea how to prepare. My parents taught me to save for a rainy day, and I have obeyed their precepts, but I have no confidence that thrift will be any more successful in my case than it was in theirs. The amount that I could save in a decade of prosperity, even if I exercised the utmost care and my bank was as strong as Gibraltar, would not see me through a prolonged depression.

The other reliance of the middle class is insurance. Except insofar as it is a form of saving, insurance is effective only in the case of the death of the insured person. Even for one's family, however, the protection is far from complete, both because few persons in the middle middle class can carry large insurance policies and because, if financial difficulty comes, payments cannot be maintained. The fact that four policies out of every five are either abandoned or cashed suggests how difficult it is for most policyholders to keep up their payments.

Because of the inadequacies of savings accounts and insurance policies, many persons in the middle class prepare for the future by making investments. Can security be reached this way? I know little about this from personal experience, but I have been reading a book called *False Security*, by an accountant and attorney named Bernard J. Reis.

Mr. Reis tells the story of Edgar D. Brown of Pottsville, Pennsylvania, as it was revealed to a Senate investigating committee. In 1928, Mr. Brown decided to go to California for his health, and just at this time he read an advertisement of the National City Bank. "Are you thinking of a lengthy trip?" it asked. "If you are, it will pay you to get in touch with our institution, because you will be leaving the advice of your local banker, and we will be able to keep you closely guided as regards your investments." He answered the advertisement, and was called upon by a representative of the National City Company, a subsidiary of the bank. Mr. Brown had cash, United States bonds, and Italian bonds amounting to approximately \$100,000. He turned this sum over to the National City Company, which invested it for him.

"Did you get anything back out of your investments?" Mr. Pecora asked him.

"Not a cent."

Mr. Brown was representative of a large group of American citizens in search of security. These citizens, according to Mr. Reis, have lost some twelve billion dollars in foreign bonds, real estate bonds, guaranteed mortgages and mortgage certificates, and investment trusts — in what are called gilt-edged investments.

To many of them the losses represented the destruction of every bulwark against poverty. "I am now past ninety years of age," one unfortunate individual wrote a Congressional investigating committee, "and my earning power is gone and I expected this investment would take care of Ma and me when we were old, but now it is swept away."

Another said, "I have scrimped and saved for my old age but am now cleaned out."

Mr. Reis tells a gloomy story. Thousands of middle-class Americans, trying to prepare for old age or for unemployment, have lost every cent they had in what appeared to be reliable investments.

In the course of describing what he calls "the betrayal of the American investor," Mr. Reis teaches an important lesson: the only way to be safe is to be on the inside. There was Ellis L. Phillips, for instance. Mr. Phillips was President of the Long Island Lighting Company and also personal owner of Ellis L. Phillips & Co. In twenty years the Phillips company, with an original investment of \$50,000, made profits of over five million, mostly on work done for the Long Island Lighting Company. The lighting company, in one instance, paid \$65,000 for equipment worth \$11,000. Mr. Phillips, so long as he could play that game, did not have to worry.

In an advertisement of the Westchester Title and Trust Company, published in December, 1932, a mother and father were portrayed beside a Christmas tree. "Some of the gifts parents bestow on children at Christmas time," the advertisement read, "should be more than the ordinary present of things. It is an opportunity to inculcate a useful habit, a lesson in investment. A guaranteed first mortgage certificate paying five and a half percent is the ideal gift." The vice-president who composed this Christmas message sold the \$15,000 worth of these certificates held by his wife and children.

In 1931 the American Car and Foundry Company was more than three million dollars in the red, but it paid President W. H. Woodin a salary of \$94,537. Continental Oil of Delaware showed a loss of more than ten million, but its president received the usual hundred thousand a year.

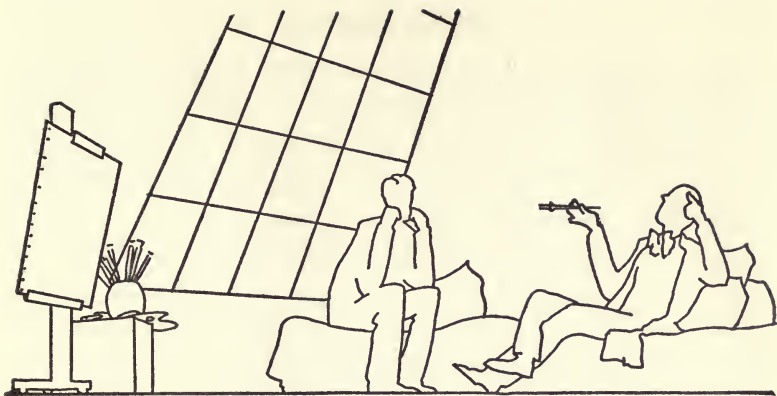
Crucible Steel, with a deficit of two million, gave the chairman of the board \$150,000. Marshall Field, though its deficit was five million, was able to pay two salaries of \$50,000 each and one of \$75,000. Bethlehem Steel lost over nineteen million in 1932, but Charles M. Schwab continued to draw his salary of a quarter of a million a year.

If you're at the top, you come about as close to security as anyone can in our present productive system. You don't have to worry about your job, and, when a depression comes, you can make the workers and the investors carry the losses. Of course, some of the big boys jumped out of twenty-eighth story windows when the market broke. One or two were put in jail. Most of them had to close up a house or two during the depression and fire a dozen servants. But for the most part they weathered the storm all right.

If you're not at the top, there are some unpleasant questions that may have occurred to you. Lawyers, doctors, teachers, ministers, business men, salaried officials — all have suffered in the course of this depression. How sure are you that you will not suffer in the next one? And is not the emergency likely to be bigger than any possible preparations you can make for it?

You and I, I rather think, are in the same boat, though you may not realize it. It is a somewhat more comfortable craft than many of those we see about us, but it is no more certain of getting safe to port.





## VIII. Our Vanishing Class

“I HATE AMERICA,” a young poet said to me several years ago. “It’s such a middle-class nation. Middle-class people are smug and conventional and materialistic. They have no spirit themselves, and they crush the spirit in others. They stifle the arts. There’s something in the American atmosphere I can’t stand.”

To a student of literature those words recall many things that have been said in the past. They remind me, for example, of the way Matthew Arnold used to belabor the middle class as Philistines, and of Flaubert’s sardonic descriptions of the French bourgeoisie. I think of Sinclair Lewis’ *Babbitt*, Mencken’s amusing assaults on the American boob, Harold Stearns’s symposium on the absence of civilization in the United States. Behind my poet stood a host of other poets and of novelists, critics, painters, sculptors, musicians — all pointing accusing fingers at the middle class.

On the other hand, I know a widely-traveled lawyer who insists that it is precisely because the United States is a middle-class nation that he likes it. "I have no use for 'high society,' " he says, "with titles or without. I respect a workingman who does his job well, but I haven't much in common with the working class. Middle-class people are solid, responsible, intelligent. Not intellectual, you understand, but intelligent. They know what's what. They're not stupid and they're not flighty. You can count on them every time."

In their estimate of the middle class and its virtues and vices both the lawyer and the poet are partly right. On the point they agree on, however, they are, curiously, both wrong. This is not a middle-class nation.

Once upon a time the phrase "middle class" meant something. In the feudal era there were two principal classes — the titled landowners at the top and the serfs at the bottom. With the rise of business enterprise, a third group appeared — the independent men of affairs. At first they were merchants, then bankers, then manufacturers. Gradually feudalism was destroyed by this middle class. In America there was not much destroying to be done. In the North there was never a real aristocracy, and the slave-owning aristocracy of the South was eliminated by the Civil War. Thereafter there were only two classes — the middle class and the working class.

So our use of the term "middle class" has gradually changed. Once it included all men engaged in business. Now we set off the richest and most powerful businessmen and those living on large incomes from business, as the plutocracy. This is the upper class, the manual laborers constitute the working class, and what is in between we call the middle class.

The middle class, as ordinarily thought of today, is made up of the smaller businessmen, the managerial groups, members of the professions, and white-collar workers in general. My father, for example, who was at various times a factory superintendent, a shipping clerk, an office manager, and a paymaster, always thought of himself as belonging to the middle class.

This is the group that R. L. Duffus has in mind when, in a recent issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, he talks about "Our Backbone: a Middle Class." "What one finds," he says, "as one goes about the country is evidence that we are still overwhelmingly a middle-class nation. . . . There are no signs whatever that the huge middle class layer is being crushed between the plutocracy and the proletariat. Or rather there are no signs that it believes that it is being crushed."

It is significant that Mr. Duffus cites no statistics. If he had looked at the figures — for example, in such a book as Lewis Corey's *The Crisis of the Middle Class* — he might have changed his mind. One hundred years ago four out of every five of the gainfully employed (exclusive of slaves) owned their own means of livelihood. They were farmers, professional men, storekeepers, manufacturers. Today four out of every five are paid wages or salaries.

That tells us what is happening to the middle class. In the early eighteen hundreds a farmer's life, whatever its hardships, represented independence and a considerable degree of security. Recent trends are indicated by a fact we have already encountered: there were only a million farm tenants in 1880 and nearly three million in 1935. Between 1930 and 1936 over a million of the three million and a half independently owned

farms in this country were foreclosed. In February, 1935, there were seven hundred thousand farmers and their families and six hundred thousand farm laborers on relief. Even in 1929 approximately half the farmers in the United States had incomes, including food consumed or traded, of less than \$1,000 a year.

Here is the story in agriculture today. At the top there are three hundred thousand prosperous farmers, cultivating large tracts of land with hired labor and making substantial profits. Then there are a million, six hundred thousand farmers who are getting by. On the lower levels they are constantly in danger of being thrust down among the four million, three hundred thousand poor farmers and tenants. These are little better off than the two million, six hundred thousand hired laborers, whose wages, according to a recent government survey, vary from \$62 a year to \$748.

If you are interested in percentages, it works out something like this. Less than four percent of farmers are independent and secure. Seventy-eight percent are terribly insecure and are either not independent at all or only nominally so. About eighteen percent can be regarded as belonging to the middle class. These are independent, but most of them are not secure.

Turning to business and trade, we find that there were 2,100,000 independent enterprisers when the 1930 census was taken. You have only to think of the bankruptcies within your knowledge to realize that the number is much smaller now. And you have only to talk with the small tradesmen in your vicinity to appreciate how often the independence is purely nominal.



We are well enough aware of what has been happening. Thirty or forty years ago there was a great outcry against the trusts, which, it was pointed out, were swallowing up the small businesses. Despite the outcry, the process went on. In 1929 six out of every one hundred manufacturing plants were the big fellows. The six percent of big fellows employed considerably more than half of the workers and turned out more than two-thirds of the goods. One out of every four hundred corporations was a big fellow. This one-quarter of one percent received sixty percent of all net corporate income, whereas seventy percent — the little fellows — got only one-twentieth of the income. That was 1929, and in the past eight years many of the big fellows have got bigger and many of the little fellows have — vanished.

In retail trade it's the same story. Five hundred thousand storekeepers have been put out of business during the depression. It has been figured out that, when a man starts a store, the chances are it will fail in less than seven years.

A new grocery store is opened on a nearby corner. The proprietor and his wife and children work all day and often late at night. Nevertheless he manages to sell only sixteen dollars' worth of goods a day. (That is the average for grocery and delicatessen stores.) He keeps on for two or three years, living miserably, and then has to give up. Perhaps, if he is lucky, the chain store that moves in will give him a job.

Even the professions are not much better off. There are about two and a half million professional men in the country, and two million of these are employed by others and paid salaries. The five hundred thousand independent professionals include all the hopeful but idle lawyers, all the struggling

young doctors and dentists, all the architects looking wistfully for clients.

Lewis Corey estimates that in 1930 there were twelve and a half million members of the middle class, exclusive of farmers. Three out of every four of these were on salary. Independence, in other words, is no longer the distinguishing characteristic of the middle class. Of the independent business and professional men, a large proportion, as we have seen, are badly off economically and have no security.

When we turn to the more than nine million salaried employees, we find the same split. Even in 1930 only about one in eight of these received more than \$3,000 a year. The average was \$1,800. The average for clerical workers was \$1,400.

What distinguishes a clerical worker from a factory hand? He sits at a desk instead of standing at a machine, and wears a suit and a white collar instead of overalls. But he is paid no better than skilled workers; he has no more security; his job is just as much a matter of routine; he is ordered about quite as freely by his superiors.

Above these are the minor officials — foremen, inspectors, technicians. They receive slightly larger salaries, have somewhat greater responsibilities. But, as my father's experience shows, they are no more secure and really no more independent. One has to go a long way up in the scale before one comes to independence and security. A salesman may receive a very pretty salary — almost as much, let us say, as might be made available to everyone in the United States — and yet be in constant dread of losing his job if he falls below his quota. A manager who does not get results — and getting results means

the constant bullying of the people underneath him — can be fired as easily as the elevator boy or the night watchman.

Even before the depression opportunities for salaried employees were decreasing. Scientific management was introduced into the clerical field in the twenties, with the result that, on the average, nine men could do what ten had done before. At the same time the high schools and colleges were turning out more and more graduates to compete for the jobs.

Among salaried professionals there is sometimes a greater degree of security. Nevertheless, the average teacher — teachers constitute the largest group — is not well-paid and has only a precarious hold on his job. As educational budgets were cut during the depression, at least two hundred thousand teachers lost their positions. In Michigan and Nebraska teachers' salaries were reduced as much as sixty percent. In June, 1932, 576 young men and women were made Doctors of Philosophy, and when the colleges opened the next September one-third of them were jobless.

"There are no signs whatever," says Mr. Duffus, "that the huge middle class layer is being crushed between the plutocracy and the proletariat." The middle-class layer, we have discovered, is not being crushed; it is simply disappearing. Once it constituted seventy-five percent of the gainfully employed. Today, no matter how broadly defined, it includes between a quarter and a third.

And of the twelve to fifteen million in this diminished class, at least three-quarters are not independent; own nothing but personal property or unprofitable farms, stores, or businesses; have incomes well below the comfort level; and are

unsure of their positions. The office workers, the lower paid officials, the small-salaried professionals, the still independent but precarious farmers, the small shopkeepers and small businessmen — these make up the great bulk of what we call the middle class.

The great majority of the middle class are workers, just like any other workers, and with exactly the same interests. They have not been crushed between the plutocracy and the proletariat; they have simply been merged with the working class.

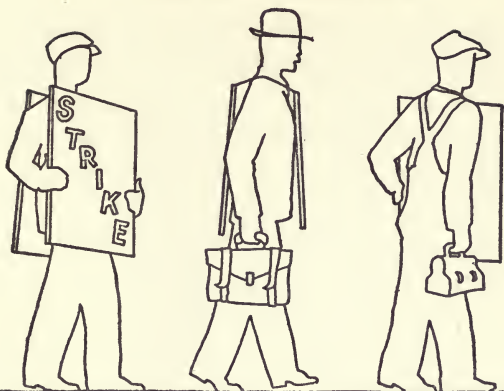
Mr. Duffus is apparently not wholly unconscious of this, for he adds: "Or rather there are no signs that it believes it is being crushed." The trouble is that Mr. Duffus is looking for the wrong kind of sign. He says that, if the middle class felt it was being crushed, it would revolt, would turn against both the plutocracy and the proletariat; and this, he observes, is not happening.

But why should the middle class revolt against the proletariat? Is the proletariat responsible for its plight? Some middle-class people have, it is true, been foolish enough to think so. They have felt that, if the workers could be held down to slavery, the middle class would somehow benefit.

But most of us are not so blind. We can see that the working class is not our enemy but our natural ally. White-collar workers and manual laborers have the same bosses, are hurt by the same conditions, are controlled by the same economic forces.

If Mr. Duffus had really wanted to find evidence that the middle class is beginning to realize what is happening to it, he should have looked at the growth of the labor unions that





are being formed for white-collar workers or that include both types.

Brought up on the tales of Richard Harding Davis and O. Henry, I used to think of a reporter as a peculiarly romantic figure. It took me a long time to realize that the average reporter is paid a very small sum for doing an enormous amount of work, most of it dull. But after a while I got to know a good many journalists, and the romance vanished.

And yet it never occurred to me that reporters could be organized in a trade union. They were not romantic heroes, I found, but they were, on the whole, a hard-boiled and cynical lot, considerably disillusioned by all they had seen. They did plenty of complaining about their condition, but I couldn't imagine their translating their complaints into action.

Most newspaper owners were equally confident that their employees were safe, and there was a good deal of jesting when the American Newspaper Guild was founded. But the Guild has grown steadily. It has had a number of stiff battles,

and it has won most of them. And its members, as I have observed a lot of them, have lost their old cynicism. They believe in the labor movement — the movement of all labor, regardless of collars — and they are willing to work for it.

Teachers used to seem to me quite as impossible to organize as reporters. For ten years I taught in various colleges, and many of my colleagues have been smug, narrow-minded, largely indifferent to what was happening off the campus, and extremely timid. But not all teachers are given to hiding behind their white collars. The American Federation of Teachers, though small, is growing. I have seen some of its chapters in action. Most of the members are young men and women who know what is happening to the middle class and know what to do about it.

I have just read in this morning's paper that one of the largest department stores in New York City has signed a closed-shop contract with the United Retail Employees Union. Why shouldn't the clerks in the department stores and the five-and-tens organize and fight for their rights? Are they different from their sisters who are working in garment factories? Are they any less workers?

Every stratum of the middle class is affected. The actors have had a closed shop in most legitimate theaters for years. Moving picture stars and moving picture writers have their unions. The youthful Book and Magazine Guild, made up of workers in publishing houses and magazine offices, is affiliated with the C.I.O. There are two unions of government employees.

One out of every eight white-collar workers belongs to a trade union and one out of every ten professional men and

women. And yet Mr. Duffus, who knows well enough that this has come about in the past few years, can find no evidence that the middle class is conscious of a change in its status.

There are all sorts of signs. Mr. Duffus has commented from time to time on the number of writers today who are radicals. He might have realized that, whether he likes these writers and their work or not, their radicalism is part of the revolt of the middle class. Hundreds of writers, artists, and musicians have taken their stand with the working class.

America isn't a middle-class nation. Sixty percent of the gainfully employed are wage workers. About fourteen percent are farmers, twenty percent salaried workers, and six percent independent business and professional men.

Of the independent businessmen a small proportion — much less than one percent of the total — constitutes the plutocracy. Their allies are the most successful professional men, the higher salaried officials, and the rich farmers. Taken altogether, these make up the two or three percent of the population with incomes above \$10,000.

America is a working-class nation, which is a good reason for liking it. We are, most of us, honest toilers. The exploiters and the loafers are in a numerically insignificant minority. We of the working ninety-seven percent have made the nation what it is.

And we shall have to take upon ourselves the responsibility of making it what it might and ought to be. If a good many of us are in want and if none of us has security, that can be remedied. There can be enough for everybody. But we shall have to do something about it.

We shall all have to work together, for, whatever the differ-

ences in our collars, we all have the same fundamental interests. We have not only the same interest in protecting our jobs and our wages through the formation of unions but also the same interest in doing away with want and insecurity.

Not all of us see that. Even many of the most oppressed Americans do not yet realize that the only way they can escape from their oppression is to make the productive system serve the interests of all. And many members of the middle class allow themselves to be fooled into thinking that what is good for the big fellows is good for them.

But America is waking up, and the middle class, all things considered, is playing its part in that awakening. You can help or you can hinder the transformation that is going on. If you understand the amount of unnecessary misery there is, I think you will be generous enough to help. If you examine candidly your own position, I think you will be wise enough to help. To help, it is true, may serve your immediate interests less than to hinder. The privileged minority is always willing to pay for spies, gunmen, strikebreakers, and vigilantes — and for their equivalent on an intellectual level. If you are willing to say to yourself, "The system will probably outlast my time, and to hell with the future," you can take your pay and make the most of it.

It may not make very much difference — to anybody but yourself. We of the comfortable middle class are so much in the minority that I doubt if we can prevent the coming of a society of abundance even if we try to. We can make its coming more difficult. We can prolong and intensify the misery that now exists. We can help to bring in the violence and cruelty and barbarism of Fascism. And we can, with



luck, keep our own precious comforts and privileges while we contribute to the suffering of others. But we cannot retard forever the advance of civilization.

When the middle class was really a class, it was not afraid to fight for changes that were not only in its own interests but also in the interests of the great masses of the people. Much of what you and I cherish in American life today we owe to the struggles of our middle-class ancestors. Today the middle class is vanishing, but its ideals are not lost. We can fight for them still, and fight for them all the better because we are part of the working class.



## IX. Can We Work Together?

“BUT,” you say, “a society of abundance, a planned society — that’s collectivism.”

Let’s look, quite coolly, at the idea of collectivism. A local newspaper that I read is always crusading for something that it calls individualism. Collectivism is the editor’s great bugaboo, and he wages war against it daily.

What he forgets is that the kind of individualism he is talking about died many years ago. It was killed by big business, by the profitmaking system, by capitalism.

This editor, for example, belongs to the American Newspaper Publishers Association and is an officer of another organization of editors. The great exponents of the individualistic theories he sets forth in his columns — men like Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill — would be horrified at this.

“You have betrayed the principles of individualism,” they

would say to him. "You are not supposed to meet with other publishers and editors and work out plans in conjunction with them. They are your competitors. Stand alone in the competitive world, or cease to call yourself an individualist."

And yet the editor is only doing what all other businessmen do. I read about the Iron and Steel Institute, the Association of Railroad Executives, the Investment Bankers Association, and a hundred and one similar organizations. I remember that, when there was a waiters' strike in a nearby city and one restaurant signed up with the union, there was a bitter outcry from the other members of the Restaurant Owners' Association. This man had betrayed them. He had, the wretch, acted individually instead of waiting for a collective decision. That was treason and there was talk of severe reprisals.

But if the old-fashioned kind of individualism doesn't exist in the business world, where can we find it?

Not, certainly, among the wage earners. Can individualism, in Adam Smith's sense of the term, be anything but a joke to the average worker? He can, say the anti-collectivists, choose where he wants to work. Not if there is widespread unemployment or a shortage of jobs in his particular trade. Not if he is over forty. Not if he is tied to some community by a wife and family and household furniture and maybe a mortgaged house. In practice he is limited to two or three possibilities, even at the height of prosperity, and with not much to choose between them.

Once he has his job, even the illusion of individualism disappears. He is — horrid word! — regimented. He has made the kind of bargain that Adam Smith loved to talk about, and has agreed to work forty-eight hours a week for so much

pay. Surely as a free individual he can choose what forty-eight hours of the week to give his employer. He may, perhaps, prefer working four twelve-hour days, so that he can have three free days a week.

But that, as we all know, is ridiculous. The worker will be fined if he arrives three minutes after the whistle blows, and the gates are locked so that he cannot leave three minutes early without special permission and a reduction in pay. He must eat his lunch at a set hour, and he is lucky if the times when he can go to the toilet are not also prescribed.

Now this is not, obviously, because the employer is a mean, arbitrary fellow. He cannot help himself. Not only are there hundreds and perhaps thousands of other workers whose labor must be co-ordinated with that of the particular individual; all the various machine operations must be performed according to a plan. John Jones can't walk in, start up his machine, and go to work. It would scarcely be more absurd for a half-back to insist on playing his part of the game from one to three when the rest of the team was going to be on the field from three to five.

That is obvious enough, but we might suppose that, even if the worker has to submit to unindividualistic interference with the hours of his labor, at least the labor itself can be performed in any way he sees fit, so long as the results are satisfactory. That is the way it used to be in the old days of the craftsmen, and is still in some trades, but in the big mass-production industries the worker can no more experiment with the methods of his work than he can suit himself as to hours. In many factories the division of labor has been carried to such a point that there can be no two ways of performing the



simple process that is one man's job, and, even if there might be some variation, it will usually have been discovered that there is one best way of doing the task and the worker is compelled to do it that way.

I am not saying that this is wrong. On the contrary, it is dictated by the nature of the machine process. But it means that we have to revise our conception of individualism.

Mechanization, which inevitably limits individual choices on the job, is constantly increasing. It affects not only the manual laborers but the white-collar workers as well. It even affects the farmers. The increasing concentration of farm ownership and the increasing use of machinery are substituting "regimented" farm workers for the old-style "individualist" farmer.

Ours is a collective society in fact, though not in form, and we cannot deny it. The diminution of individual choice is only one sign.

So far as my work is concerned, I am a free man. I can work from eight o'clock in the morning till twelve at night, or I can take a day off. I can, like Walter Lippmann, get my work done in the morning, and, though I never referee polo matches, I do fairly often spend the greater part of an afternoon chopping wood or working in the garden or painting the house. The only thing that controls my working day is the amount that has to be done.

In this respect I suppose my life is like that of the Francis West who built this house. It is true that his working days, at least in summer, stretched from sunrise to sunset, but at least he felt no compulsion other than that of economic necessity and the demands of the seasons. No one told him that

he had to start milking precisely at six or that he must hoe corn from three to four-fifteen and weed onions from four-fifteen to five. He was, as the saying goes, his own man.

To that extent, as I have said, our lives are alike, but only to that extent. He was almost as independent as a consumer as he was as a producer. He grew most of what he ate. He built this house himself, with the aid of his sons. The very tools that he used were either fashioned by him or made by the blacksmith according to his specifications.

He was independent, then, in a way that I could never be. Most of our food comes from stores. It is prepared and sold by huge corporations. It is handed out in set quantities according to standards of weight and measure prescribed by the government. Even the ancient prerogative of bargaining has been stolen from us: there are fixed prices, and we can take them or leave them.

If I want an automobile, I cannot make one myself, as Francis West would have made a wagon, nor can I go to a blacksmith and have one built to suit my personal fancy. I have a wide choice of cars, it is true, a very wide choice if I have a good deal of money to spend, but I have to accept one of the models that some manufacturer has chosen. And by and large it holds that, the more willing I am to accept a model that is satisfactory to large numbers of my fellow-citizens, the lower the price I will have to pay.

We all know these things, but we aren't bothered by them. We don't regret in the least that some of our individualism has been taken from us. I like to work at the times I please, but if my choice were between working twelve hours a day as my own boss and eight hours as somebody's employee, I

should, if rewards and conditions of labor were approximately the same, choose the latter. So would any sensible man.

It is true that I am dependent upon my grocer and through him on certain large corporations, which can in some measure dictate what I eat. But actually I have an infinitely greater range of choices than Francis West ever dreamed of. I can have fresh vegetables all winter, fruits of the most exotic sorts, dozens of different kinds of meat, and, if I want and can afford them, innumerable delicacies beyond the power of medieval princes to purchase.

Some people complain that Americans are standardized. Our clothes are all just the same, they say, and our automobiles and our furniture. We listen to the same music, see the same movies, read the same newspapers. No wonder, they say, we are all alike.

Of course we aren't all alike, and no one would dream of making the accusation except in the heat of an argument. But it is true that our material civilization rests on the fact that millions of people want the same things and are willing to do the same things at the same time. When, however, I realize that I can have a better suit than I could otherwise afford, I don't care how many persons have suits like it. When I realize that I couldn't otherwise have any car, I am willing to drive one of which there are hundreds of thousands of exact duplicates. Millions of people hear some good music, whereas they would hear none if there were no radio. Millions of people get some news, and they would get none without the cheap newspapers. Our collectivism does, after a fashion, work.

I know only one simon-pure individualist. His house is his

own, ramshackle and unrepaired as it is. His half-starved, saddle-backed horse and his dirty, long-suffering cow and his anemic hens are his own. In the summer he rents a camp or two, and with the money he gets he buys the canned corned beef and the chewing tobacco that are all he needs to supplement what he raises.

He is a real individualist, too, miserly, perhaps, but not mean. When I do an errand for him, he always offers to pay me, and, since I will not accept pay for the favors I do him, he will accept none for the favors he does me.

His neighbors wanted electricity, and they approached him. "Ain't in it," he answered.

"Why not?"

"Costs too damn much."

They pointed out that his taking electricity would greatly reduce their expenses, and they offered to pay for the wiring of his house.

"Ain't in it. If I wanted the thing, I could pay for it myself. You don't have to give me nothing. Ain't in it. Don't want it. Damned nuisance."

They tried to convince him that he ought to sign up, both for their sake and his own.

"I'm out of it. That's first and last: I'm out of it. But if I was in it, I'd pay my own way."

You can't help respecting a man like that, although it's hard to reconcile yourself to his attitude if you happen to want and need electricity.

If, however, we were all willing to live as this individualist does, I grant that most of the talk about collectivism would be foolish. Actually, of course, it would be impossible to go back



to that kind of life. And who would want to? I know all that Emerson and Thoreau said about the danger of becoming a slave to things, but I also know that things can set you free. Those of us who are in a position to take advantage of the achievements of industrialism have been freed from the monotonous and unhealthy diet of our ancestors, freed from half the diseases that filled the old burying grounds with children and young people, freed — in some measure certainly — from superstition and ignorance.

Last year our friend the individualist got a bad cut on his leg. He doctored it himself. It grew inflamed and the leg swelled. At last, when it seemed to us that he must have blood poisoning, he tried skunk's grease. Gradually he grew better. But he almost paid for his rugged individualism with his life, and he did pay for it with three months in bed and three more months of lameness.

Such individualism has no appeal to us, and quite rightly. We know that, by accepting the measure of collectivism that is inherent in industrialism, we can increase our freedom. The question for us is not how we can go back to the old-fashioned agrarian individualism, or even to the individualism of the early nineteenth century, the individualism of small shopkeepers and manufacturers before there were any trusts. No, the question we have to ask is how the results of our new kind of cooperative effort can be more fairly distributed.

We know, now, all about the disappearance of the middle class. We know that the control of industry is concentrated in the hands of a relatively few individuals — sixty families or so. We have seen the growth of larger and larger corporations, employing more and more workers, combining more

and more processes under one administration, producing ever greater proportions of the total output. We have seen chain stores and mail-order houses and great department stores destroy one small independent store after another. We have seen businessmen forget their theories of competitive individualism to unite to make plans — and perhaps collusive bids and secret trade agreements as well.

This process, we realize, is linked with the growing interdependence of larger and larger groups of persons. Francis West depended on almost no one but himself. His descendants depend on thousands of persons, scattered all over the country and, for that matter, all over the world. Great armies of workers unite to make their automobiles, manufacture their clothes, produce and transport their food.

The process also entails the increasing specialization of labor, and this results in what some persons like to call regimentation. The efforts of more and more workers have to be co-ordinated, and their tasks must therefore be performed with greater and greater precision. The range of individual choice grows smaller and smaller.

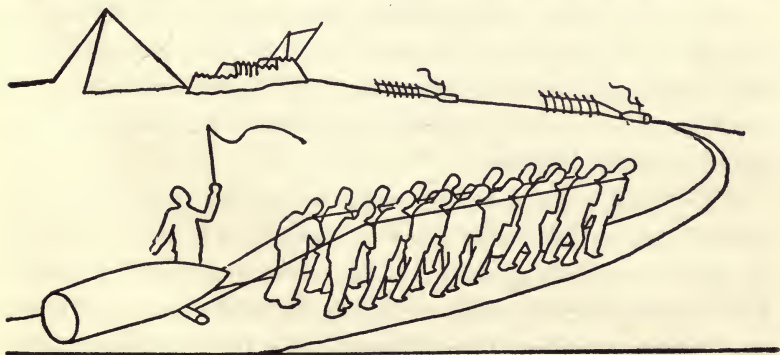
Out of this collectivizing of human effort has come great good for many persons. We can lead healthier, happier, richer lives. For many persons there are more choices, not fewer. The worker may be less free in his work, but he has or can have much more freedom in his life as a whole. Francis West's clothes were made for him personally, but he would have envied the modern man, who can, if he has the money, choose from among thousands of patterns and designs. Francis West raised his own food, but there were probably few winters when he did not grow weary of pork and potatoes.

I can go to New York City as easily as he could go to nearby Troy. Compared with his, my choices are on a grand scale.

But the trouble is that it is only a minority of the American people who have these choices. The majority have to undergo the narrowing of choices that has, on one side, accompanied the growth of industrialism, but they do not share in the multiplication of choices that has, on the other, been made possible. And, as we have seen, they could. No one needs to be deprived of the fruits of industrial progress.

To give them their share demands, as I have said, economic planning. Another way of saying this is to point out that our collectivism is one-sided. Our methods of production are essentially collective, but the control is individualistic. Thousands of persons have learned to work together, but they work under the orders of a few individuals. These individuals are not responsible to the persons who work for them; they are not responsible to the consumers of their goods; they are responsible only to themselves.

We have seen that the way a worker in a modern factory has to do his work is rigidly prescribed, and we realize that



this is not an arbitrary decision but is determined by the nature of machine production. In the old days the owner of a plant usually managed it himself. Today the owners hire a manager, and it is his job to find out exactly what the nature of machine production does require. He is, to a certain extent, a scientist — not the old-fashioned kind of boss.

But the manager has only one responsibility, and that is to make a profit for the owners. He has to drive the workers, even when his scientific knowledge tells him that care has to be taken of human beings as well as of machines. He has to keep their wages to the lowest possible amount, although he sees that enough can be produced for everyone. He has to dismiss them at the owners' orders, despite his recognition that the people of the country need what they can produce.

This is a preposterous situation. We have accepted a considerable degree of collectivism, but we refuse to follow the logic of what we have done. We refuse to see that those persons who are most affected by this collective system are robbed of its benefits, which go, in large measure, to a small minority.

It is, moreover, this minority that objects to full collectivism, to a planned economy. And, paradox of paradoxes, these privileged persons, who gain most from the kind of collectivism we now have, object to a planned economy in the name of individualism.

They are not only willing, they demand, that the individualism of the worker be crushed by long hours, by exhausting speed-ups and stretch-outs, by intolerable working conditions, by near-starvation wages, and by intimidation, espionage, and the suppression of civil liberties. But they warn this same



worker, with tears in their eyes, that he must fight against collectivism.

The profitmakers not only fail to object to the crushing of the workers' individualism. They constantly act, as we have seen, in defiance of the individualistic principles they pretend to hold. Moreover, although they insist that the government should let them alone whenever there is a question of wages or hours, they not only accept but insist upon government aid in the form of tariffs, subsidies, and "fair price" laws.

What the privileged minority mean when they talk about individualism is perfectly clear: they mean their personal right to make a profit. But they are too shrewd to say so, and that is why they talk about regimentation and slavery.

It is quite true that, in order to have the abundance we can have, it will be necessary to curb the liberty of the privileged individual to make a profit. That is the only way, however, in which liberty and individualism would be seriously threatened. The great majority of the American people would at last have a real chance to develop as individuals. They would share in the wealth that our large-scale cooperation has made possible, and they would have a chance to grow.

Talk to the people who are on relief, about individualism. Talk to mothers who have to take care of families of five or six on incomes of twelve or fifteen dollars a week. Talk to the thousands of children who are working in factories. Talk to the sharecroppers. Talk to the victims of industrial diseases. Talk to the undernourished school children. Talk to the slum dwellers.

These people will tell you how much individualism they have. And they will tell you what it would mean to them, in

terms of individual possibilities, if they were given a decent living standard.

We can give them a decent living standard. We can free them from their bondage to poverty and insecurity and disease. We can do it. Now! But we will have to do it, you and I and the millions of Americans in the working class and the vanishing middle class.

We can't leave it to the people who now control our industrial machinery. They won't do it, and they can't. We'll have to.

One night in 1930 I was visiting friends of mine in New York, and one of their guests was some sort of Wall Street specialist. He told us that capitalists had really learned their lesson. They hadn't been able to prevent this depression, but they would prevent the next one. "The younger men," he said with a sweeping gesture, "the younger men understand what is happening. They know that finance capitalism" — that was his phrase — "has got to clean house. And they're going to do it! Give us another chance! Give us time! Give us twenty-five more years!"

"And if you fail?" somebody asked.

"Then you can string us up from the lampposts." And he finished his drink.

It made a great impression upon me. For months certain of my friends had been asking, "Why not Communism? Capitalism has failed. Why not Communism?"

I didn't know why not, and I wanted to, badly. I didn't like the idea of being a Communist, and I wanted to find some good reason for not being one. This Wall Street gentleman seemed to have the perfect answer. Capitalists, he assured us, were growing wiser. They knew they had to learn how to

distribute the abundance that they were able to produce. They could and they would abolish poverty and depressions. They would learn how to plan. Why not give them their chance? Let them have their twenty-five years and then, if they failed, it was time enough to start worrying about Communism.

I went home in a rather exalted frame of mind: I had at last found the right attitude to take toward the facts of the depression. But my exaltation did not last long. The idea of a capitalism wise enough to plan for abundance appealed to me so much that I began to read what had been written on the subject. I found that many persons had considered the matter. One careful student had even worked out a detailed description of what the capitalists would have to do in order to bring about the era of plenty.

It was this prospectus that shook my faith. I could see that it was perfectly sound, that capitalists would have to do the things he said, and I knew damn well they wouldn't do them. Even the very decent businessmen of my acquaintance wouldn't. Sadly I shook my head; it wouldn't work.

I did not have to wait long to have my doubts confirmed. Their actions showed me that businessmen hadn't learned a thing from the depression. Every advocate of a planned capitalism agreed that the cutting of wages, for instance, would only make the depression worse. Yet most employers were slashing pay, even when it wasn't necessary to save their skins. They were, in fact, up to all their old tricks, taking full advantage of unemployment not only to lower wage rates but also to break unions. If there were any such "new" capitalists as my Wall Street friend had talked about, they were obviously a powerless minority.

Later on we were given a demonstration on a national

scale of the refusal of big business to look at anything but profits. When Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated in 1933, the country, paralyzed by the closing of the banks, was begging for a savior. Even business was scared, scared and sick, and, because sick, thinking of monkhood. The President offered business a plan for its own salvation, the National Industrial Recovery Act. I am not saying that the Blue Eagle might have brought us the era of abundance, for I am afraid the bird was headed in the opposite direction. What does interest me is that the N.R.A. was an attempt to get businessmen to work together, and the businessmen killed it. Oh, at first, when they were sick enough, they accepted it and rejoiced, but as soon as there was a suspicion of recovery, they revolted against President Roosevelt's plan and demanded the right to make the largest possible profits.

Businessmen can get together, in defiance of their individualistic precepts, and agree to keep prices up. Or they can get together to hire labor spies. Or they can get together to propagandize against a decent standard of living. But they can't get together for plenty. Profits and abundance simply don't go together.

And if we ever hear businessmen talking about a planned capitalism, we had better watch out. At the moment the very word "plan" is anathema to them, but, in a period of stress, they might adopt it, as they have adopted "individualism." And their "plan" would be a desperate scheme to protect their privileges, just as the only "individualism" that interests them is the right to make profits. It would be a Fascist "plan" to make scarcity permanent.

The businessmen won't bring in the era of abundance. We'll have to do it, and we'll have to start now.



Part of our job, of course, is to convince people that they don't have to be poor — not any more. But we need action as well as argument. Right now we can use our knowledge that abundance is possible. For example, we can work for an adequate wages and hours bill. Today low wages are not merely cruel; they are bad policy. By increasing the ability to consume we can help put our industrial machinery to work.

The same thing is true of relief. Higher relief standards and really effective legislation for social security are sound from an economic as well as a humanitarian point of view. They are absolutely essential at the present stage of our industrial development.

We can fight against every attempt to cut down production, for the only intelligent thing to do, when there are apparent surpluses, is to create new customers, not to produce less.

We can act, in short, as if we lived in a highly advanced industrial civilization, not in some primitive society where people had to starve.

And because we are dealing with matters that directly concern us and all other workers, we will insist upon the full right to organize. We will count upon our government to help us in this fight for abundance, but we will rely primarily on our own strength.

Of course there will be resistance to such measures as I have suggested. We have seen how public opinion can be manipulated to oppose legislation that businessmen are afraid of. We know of the lobbies that great industries maintain and the laws they have contrived to kill. We know, also, how laws can be twisted to defeat the ends they were intended to serve. Resistance, we may expect, will be vigorous, unceasing, and subtle.

But we need not be afraid of this resistance. If we — hand workers and brain workers alike — are organized, we can meet either economic or political attacks.

What, however, if there should be attacks of another kind? Such measures would undoubtedly diminish the profits of big business. They might, moreover, make it clear to millions of Americans that profits ought to be abolished altogether. Businessmen, I'm afraid, wouldn't like that. They might be tempted to abandon their present methods of resistance to change and resort to more desperate measures. For when the masses of the people have learned to use their government for their purposes, big business might decide to take power into its own hands.

Let us imagine that, among the many demagogues that are always plaguing the country, one has emerged as a national figure, a powerful orator, a man quick to play upon prejudices and unrestrained with promises. Suppose that big business decides that this man can be useful. Consequently he finds himself with unlimited means at his disposal. He arms his followers — paid thugs, bums eager for square meals and a chance to loot, young fellows who have never had a job and are restlessly seeking adventure and opportunity. And, with the blessings and the money of big business, he marches on Washington to take over the government.

We have a name for that sort of thing — Fascism. That isn't the name that the big businessmen and the demagogue will use. In her pamphlet on vigilanteism Isobel Soule tells a story. She was talking with some businessmen, and she asked one of them if he believed in Fascism. "Of course not for this country," he answered, "but it is excellent for Germany and

Italy. We could stamp out any 'ism' in five minutes, through a citizens' committee, vigilantes, like you were talking about a moment ago, to protect our American rights and liberties."

No, the march on Washington will be conducted in the name of American rights and liberties, and, though it will be Fascism, it will be called something else.

But whatever it is called, it will have to be stopped. Not only because Fascism stirs up race prejudice, crushes labor unions, persecutes religious groups, tortures political opponents, and destroys culture; not only because it thrives upon nationalism and leads inevitably to war; but also because it is a plan for scarcity instead of a plan for abundance. Through Fascism big business, for the sake of profit, abandons any attempt to use our productive capacity and condemns the people to bare subsistence. Glory Fascism offers on every hand, but not the plenty that has become our birth-right.

If the people realize this, they will crush the uprising. Then what? Can we tell the businessmen that, if they will promise to be good little boys, all will be forgiven. I shouldn't think so. It is not a question of punishing the leaders, but of taking from them the power that makes it possible for them to start a rebellion. We will have to do the owning of the means of production.

But this, you say, is Socialism. You are quite right. Socialists and Communists do believe that the people should own industry. They say that the profit system stands in the way of abundance for all, and the profit system must be abolished. They say that we are ready to produce enough for everybody, and we ought to do it. They say we have the managerial skill,

the labor, the raw materials, and the machines. Let the workers work, the managers manage, and the people own.

I happen to be a Communist. I wasn't born a Communist, nor did I learn Communism in some foreign country, nor am I paid by Moscow. I became a Communist because, after I had discovered that capitalism wouldn't plan, I made up my mind that I would find out just what had to be done. I looked around, and it seemed to me quite clear that the Communists not only had the clearest conception of how a society of abundance was to be brought about but were doing the most effective work toward that end. I decided that that was the group I wanted to work with.

I became a Communist by a process that can be retraced in this book. My own situation was pleasant enough for one of fairly moderate tastes, but I could not help seeing that I was enjoying privileges of which the majority of my fellow-citizens were deprived. I didn't want to see it, and all through the twenties — though it was also true then — I refused to see it. But the depression made me admit that there was a good deal in America that no decent person could afford to like. I looked at housing and diet and wages and unemployment and relief and lack of relief, and all the time I knew there could be enough for everybody.

Some of my friends, I have already pointed out, were saying, "Why not Communism?" But, as I have confessed, I was good at snatching at straws. It wasn't only that, with no excuse whatsoever, I had some of the usual misconceptions of Communism. It was largely that I didn't want to do anything. I wanted to be left alone with my particular job and let someone else do the dirty work of bringing plenty to the American people.



But in time — and I hate to admit how much time — I realized that either I had to stop thinking of myself as a reasonably honest person or else get to work. And for me that meant only one thing. It may not mean the same thing to you. I don't say that the Communists are the only people who are working for a society of abundance. But for me getting to work meant cooperating with the Communists and, eventually, joining the Communist Party.

At this point, inevitably, somebody asks about Russia. The other night I was listening to a radio symposium on democracy. One of the speakers was a Communist, and most of the other speakers and all the questioners in the audience devoted their time to talking about the Soviet Union. That seemed to me a pity. There are plenty of questions to be asked about democracy in the United States, and that, after all, is our problem. Let us by all means discuss democracy in other countries, but not to such an extent that we ignore the tasks that face us as Americans.

Still, since I have said I am a Communist, I have invited arguments about the Soviet Union, and I have no desire to dodge them, so long as we can keep a sense of proportion.

The Russians have put Socialism into practice. When the capitalist system broke down in Russia during the war, a group of determined men, who called themselves Communists to distinguish them from other Socialists who were less determined, offered the people a program to prevent the country from falling into a state of complete collapse. To do this, they had to act quickly. They had to nationalize industries and get them running somehow. Soon the capitalists of other nations, frightened because Socialism was actually being tried, gave aid to the ex-capitalists of Russia. There was a

counter-revolution, a long and bloody civil war. But the Communists had the majority of the Russian people back of them, and at last they won. There were several years in which it was almost all they could do to hold their own, but in time they began to repair the damage done by world war and civil war, and finally they were ready to build a new social order from the ground up. Even the most anti-Communist observer has to admit that they have done a remarkable job. No country in the world has ever developed so fast in so short a time. Most workers in other countries are worse off than they were in 1913. Soviet workers, though their standards are still low when compared with those of our higher-paid workmen, are infinitely better off than they were before the war.

The great argument against the Soviet Union used to be that Socialism had failed, but that argument is seldom offered today. In spite of the backwardness of the country, in spite of the devastation wrought by war, in spite of opposition from without and from within, in spite of the ever-present need to prepare for attack from hostile nations, the Soviet Union has proved that Socialism will work. It has shown that unemployment can be abolished, that vast programs of construction can be undertaken, that the general living standard can be raised.

Today the principal argument raised against the Soviet Union is not that Socialism has failed but that it has succeeded through the sacrifice of individualism and liberty.

Perhaps the first thing to remember is that it is not safe to believe all you read. In the early days of the revolution it was reported every week or so that Lenin had been killed. Every two or three months since I can remember somebody has

proven conclusively that capitalism has been restored. Enough persons have been reported shot or starved, at one time or another, to depopulate the entire country. Yet Socialism survives, and the population increases faster than that of any other nation in Europe.

It is true that certain liberties have been denied the people of the Soviet Union — the right to advocate the return of capitalism, the right to preach counter-revolution. These are not rights that many people want, but the Soviets have had to be careful, both because the old ruling classes have been their implacable enemies and because they are surrounded by foes. During our participation in the World War we suspended all the rights that have ever been suspended in Soviet Russia, which has been under attack or in immediate danger of attack ever since 1917.

It is unpleasant to know that you might at some time be suspected of being a spy, but the explanation is not that the government is tyrannous but that spies are plentiful and dangerous. It is unpleasant to have to be careful what you say, lest your remarks be interpreted as treason, but the explanation is that there are traitors.

The majority of the people in the Soviet Union have more freedom than they have ever had before, and in certain ways more freedom than has ever been enjoyed by the masses of any other land. It is a pity, no doubt, that they cannot have the right to advocate the restoration of capitalism, even though they do not want it back. But they have other rights, rights that directly concern their daily lives, and these may be more important.

I want to make it perfectly clear, even at the risk of an-

tagonizing some readers, that I regard the Soviet Union as a great achievement in itself, as the only real hope for peace in the world today, and as a powerful force for world-wide Socialism.

But it is not necessary therefore to assume that the introduction of Socialism in the United States would follow the same course as it has in Russia. Our productive system is so much more advanced than Russia's was in 1917 that most of the hardships suffered by the Russian people could be avoided, and control of the productive machinery is so much more centralized that socialization would meet with fewer obstacles. Moreover, much of the preliminary experimentation has already been done — in the Soviet Union — and we could benefit by that experience.

No, the principal reason for talking about the Soviet Union is that persons who misunderstand or deliberately misrepresent what has happened try to find in what they conceive to be the situation there arguments against a planned economy for America. I say that there has been nothing in the history of the Soviet Union to frighten or discourage us; on the contrary, the twenty years of Socialism in Russia ought to give us tremendous hope and enthusiasm. But, whether this is true or not, we ought to be able to stand on our own feet.

After all, the important thing to realize is how close we are — right now — to having a society of abundance. Not only have we the machinery for production; we have the machinery for distribution — railroads, trucks, networks of stores.

History, looking back on the year 1938, is likely to feel that by that time the difficult part of the job was really done. All that remained then, historians will say, was to clear a few



obstacles out of the way. And they will wonder why we made such a bother about getting rid of them.

There is no sense in being frightened by the word "collectivism" when you're not frightened by the reality. There is no sense in refusing to look at the logical next step for civilization to take — which happens to be Socialism. There is no sense in being panicky about Communists, merely because they sincerely believe in Socialism and work for it.

I am a Communist, and you are, I hope, a person who believes that we can and ought to give everybody in America a decent income. I believe, as I have said, that this can be done only if we get rid of the profit system, and I am afraid we may have our troubles with the profitmakers. But I do not propose to do away with capitalism right now and all of a sudden. Instead, I merely advocate that we do what we can, within the capitalist framework, to get our productive machinery working and to distribute its output to those who need it.

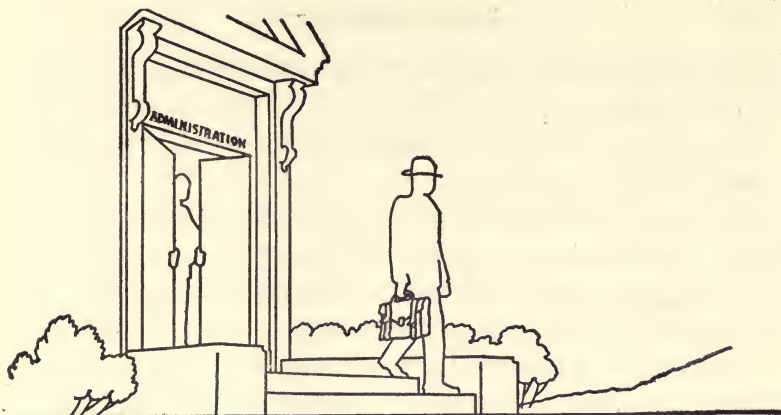
You are interested in exactly the same measures — wages and hours bills, social security legislation, protection of civil liberties and especially the right to organize. You think, however, that these measures may be enough, that through reforms of this kind we can seize the opportunity for abundance without getting rid of profits.

All right. We agree on these measures. Let us work together for them. If you prove to be right, that settles the matter, for it would be quite impossible to do away with capitalism if the masses of people were prosperous. If you're wrong — well, I don't believe you will stand by and let Fascism stamp its economy of scarcity upon us.

Some people seem to think we will find it difficult to plan for abundance. I don't. The complexity of a modern automobile factory or a modern department store would have staggered our ancestors. We have learned how to organize production and distribution on an incredibly vast scale, and the idea of our all working together is simply the next step.

To some persons the idea of working together is distressing. Like our local individualist, they ain't in it. Just last week, I heard of a woman whose individualism surpassed our friend's. A sewer was being put through on her street, and she refused, on purely individualistic grounds, to give up her own private cesspool.

But most of us, fortunately, don't cling to our cesspools. I imagine most of the dwellers in the Pennsylvania coal patch would gladly exchange their publicly located, if individualistically controlled, privies for private bathrooms connected with a collective sewage system.



## X. The Freeing of America

AMERICANS are rather touchy on the subject of liberty, and quite rightly so. More than once we have had to fight for liberty, and we do not intend to lose what we have gained.

For this reason no American politician dares to denounce the idea of liberty as Hitler denounces it in Germany and Mussolini in Italy. On the contrary, liberty is the chief pre-occupation of editorial writers and columnists, of American Legion commanders and even Kleagles of the Ku Klux Klan. Since the end of the World War I cannot remember hearing a politician or an editorial writer condemn a measure because it gave too much liberty. Always the emphasis is on the danger that existing liberties will be infringed.

But we have learned that the self-appointed defenders of individualism do not really want the majority of individuals to have a chance to develop, and I think we might view with

at least preliminary skepticism the protestations of some of the champions of liberty. Before we consider liberty under collectivism, we had better examine the situation of liberty in the United States today.

One sacred element in the ideal of liberty is academic freedom. Teachers are custodians of the truth, and their function as truth seekers and truth-tellers must not be interfered with. So I was told when I became a teacher, and I believed it.

As a teacher I satisfied the conventional academic requirements, and, so far as student response can be gauged, I seemed to be successful. I contributed to various periodicals, and this, in college teaching, is usually an asset. On various occasions I was assured that my work was satisfactory.

After three years as an instructor at Smith College and a year of graduate work at Harvard, I became an assistant professor of English at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. This was in 1929, and in the next few years I made some of the discoveries that I have recorded in this book.

My radicalism did not particularly affect my teaching. English and American literature, freshman composition, and the writing of engineering reports are not, by and large, controversial subjects. I knew that certain of my colleagues were in the habit of voicing in the classroom their views on religion, morals, and politics, but I did not follow their example. I limited myself to the subjects I was being paid to teach, and, though I naturally gave my own interpretation of books and literary movements, I pointed out that mine was only one among many points of view.

My radicalism did, however, affect what I was writing and saying and doing outside the classroom. If academic



freedom means anything, it must mean that a teacher has a right to avail himself of all the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. It does not mean that a man is free only so long as he agrees with the board of trustees of his institution. I knew that the views I was expressing could not please the various industrialists and financiers who determine the policies of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. And, to be frank, I expected those businessmen to use their power and fire me. That is only natural. But it is not liberty.

My dismissal came in the spring of 1935. It was not attributed to my radicalism but to an alleged need for retrenchment. But nobody believed that. My colleagues, my students, the newspapers, and I myself went on the assumption, later confirmed by two investigating committees, that I was dismissed because of my political and economic views. And the acting president, while clinging to the retrenchment story, defended in his commencement address the right of the institution to dismiss a member of the faculty for economic heresy. I was not fired, he maintained, because I was a radical, but, if I had been fired for that reason, it would have been all right.

My experience, of course, is not unique. In 1926 Professor John E. Kirkpatrick was dropped from the faculty of Olivet College, Michigan, because of what he said in a book significantly entitled *The American College and Its Rulers*. In 1927 Sol Auerbach was dismissed from the philosophy department of the University of Pennsylvania for defending Soviet Russia. He was told that it was "incompatible for a man to take a stand on a public issue and at the same time to retain the critical state of mind necessary for research in philosophy and teach-

ing." A professor who was on the payroll of the Power Trust of New Jersey was not dismissed.

In 1928 Wesley Maurer, having written some articles sympathetic to striking miners, lost his job at Ohio University. In 1929 the University of Pittsburgh dismissed Fred E. Woltman because he was secretary of the local Civil Liberties Commission, and in 1934 dismissed Dr. Ralph E. Turner because he had actively advocated certain kinds of labor legislation. During the past decade a dozen or more colleges have been under investigation by the American Association of University Professors for curtailing academic freedom. Most recently Yale University has discharged Jerome Davis and Harvard has refused to renew the contracts of two organizers of the local Teachers Union, Raymond Walsh and Alan Sweezy.

Year after year it is made clear to American teachers that it is dangerous to question the capitalist system. The year that I was dismissed, Silas H. Strawn, former president of the American Bar Association, said in a commencement address at Middlebury College: "I am unable to sympathize with the elastic conscience of those who inveigh against the capitalistic system while on the payroll of a college or university whose budget, or whose existence, is due to the philanthropic generosity of those whose industry and frugality have enabled them to make an endowment. . . . No one who is not a thorough believer in the soundness of the fundamental principles of our government should be permitted to teach either political economy, economics, social science, or any other subject." And at the same time the president of Middlebury College sent to all members of the faculty a

letter headed, "Don't rock the boat," in which he said that he would feel justified in asking the resignation of any teacher who brought criticism upon the college.

What all this means ought to be reasonably plain. The great academic tragedy is not the dismissal of two or three dissenters a year; it is the silencing of the spirit of criticism. I remember a colleague's saying to me, before my dismissal: "You can write. If you get fired, you can still earn a living. But what about me? My family would starve. I'm going to keep my mouth shut." I know there are thousands of teachers in America today whose private opinions would give their trustees apoplexy. Therefore the opinions remain private.

Perhaps you think this is all right. Perhaps you agree with Mr. Strawn that, if a man takes capitalist money, he ought to preach capitalist doctrine. Maybe so. But in that case let's have no talk about academic freedom. College presidents ought to say: "We will pay you so much a year for teaching exactly what we want you to teach and keeping your mouth shut outside of school hours. You've got to teach our views and act as if you believed in them. Will you sign on the dotted line?" But presidents talk about academic freedom, and then act as if some such bargain had been made.

I am still a little piqued by that hypocrisy, and my father, whenever we are discussing the question, laughs at me. He has spent all his life in business, and he can't see how anyone can be so naïve as to suppose that a boss will let his employees express views that might lessen his profits. He is amazed that anyone should regard the idea of academic freedom as anything but bunk. In business, he says, you not only have to accept the boss's views on economics; you won't get very

far if you don't pretend to approve all his ideas, from his political prejudices down to his taste in clothes.

Last summer a man got in touch with me and said he wanted to learn something about Communism. He was fed up with business. His first job was in the office of a public utility. One day at lunch he happened to say that the manual laborers employed by the company received more than the office workers. That afternoon he was given his check and told that the company wanted only loyal employees.

His next job was in a business that handled domestic loans. He found it distressing to be spending his life in bullying money out of poor people, who, he well knew, were being charged a preposterous rate of interest. But he had learned his lesson, and he kept his mouth shut. Then one day a fellow-worker asked him how he felt about the chances of getting ahead in the business, and he confessed that they seemed pretty slim. Apparently he had been talking to a stool pigeon, for he was soon afterward discharged. "The trouble with you," his boss said, "is that you're not company-minded."

These stories are true, and I suspect that most white-collar workers would agree that they're representative. And it is not merely what I think of as radicalism that is dangerous. In the autumn of 1936 there were plenty of offices in which it would have cost a man his job not to have worn a sunflower button.

I am telling you nothing that you don't know. Most persons take such facts for granted. And go right on talking about liberty. We are a free people, the newspapers thunder. But most teachers aren't free, most doctors and lawyers aren't free, most newspapermen aren't free, most office workers



aren't free. Of course you're free if your opinions agree in every particular with those in authority over you, but otherwise, in all probability, you're not.

And if you work in a factory, you're certainly not free — unless you have a strong union behind you. You not only can't express radical opinions in public; you can't even say in private that the hours are too long or the wages too low. Spies, hired by the employers, mingle with the workers and find out what men are bold enough to express discontent. And these bolder workers are quickly eliminated.

Thanks to the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee, we know something about labor spies. We know that hundreds of businesses pay millions of dollars a year to spy agencies. We know that these spies not only report on their fellow-workers but join unions for the purpose of destroying them and deliberately provoke violence. There are many thousands of these spies, a small army organized and paid to rob workers of their rights.

"But," the employer says, "labor espionage is necessary to maintain industrial peace." It is quite likely that, even from the employer's point of view, labor spies stir up more trouble than they prevent. What interests us, however, is his willingness to curb the freedom of his workers by the most underhanded methods. He believes in "liberty but."

I grew up in wartime, where there was no pretense of academic freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, or any other kind of freedom. At the time I approved. I completely sympathized with what I thought to be America's aims in entering the war, and I did not see how the government could be expected to tolerate

those who interfered with the struggle against Germany. I too believed in "liberty but."

After the war, when I was in college, I discovered that victory did not bring an end to the restrictions on liberty. On the contrary, all the fury and hysteria that had formerly been directed against conscientious objectors and Huns were now visited on people called Bolsheviks. Bolsheviks, I learned, were all those who disagreed with the attorney general. Socialists, Communists, and I.W.W.'s were jailed by the hundreds. It was the complete triumph of "liberty but."

It was at this time that I first heard about the Sacco-Vanzetti case. In May, 1920, while I was finishing my freshman year at Harvard College, a shoemaker and a fish peddler were arrested and charged with having murdered a paymaster and stolen the payroll. Known as anarchists, opponents of the war, and leaders of strikes, these men were tried just at the moment when the emotions roused by the great wartime propaganda machine were being transformed into the post-war Red hysteria. Although the evidence against them was of a sort that one competent jurist after another has since declared to be inadequate, they were found guilty and sentenced to death.

That was my first acquaintance with the frame-up. Soon afterward I learned of an earlier and perhaps even more astonishing case. In San Francisco, during a Preparedness Day parade in 1916, a bomb had exploded, killing ten persons and wounding forty. Two labor leaders, Tom Mooney and Warren K. Billings, had been convicted of the crime. Mooney was sentenced to death, but the sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. Of the two chief witnesses, one repudiated

his testimony and the second, it was proved, had tried to bribe a friend to corroborate his story. Nevertheless, Governor Stephens refused to pardon Mooney, as Governors Richardson, Young, and Rolph were subsequently to do.

The Sacco-Vanzetti case and the Mooney-Billings case contributed something to the education of a rather naïve young idealist. I continued to follow both cases, and I began to understand the frame-up. I studied, for example, the mental processes by which the California judges justified their changing attitude toward one of the witnesses for the prosecution. John McDonald, by their reasoning, was wholly dependable when he testified against Mooney and Billings but absolutely unreliable when he confessed to perjury.

In the Sacco-Vanzetti case I had the advantage, as a citizen of Massachusetts, of examining at first hand the sentiment against the two Italians, for feeling ran high in the community in which I lived. I saw that two sorts of persons desired the death of Sacco and Vanzetti. In one group were those who could say, as a detective was reported to have said, "They were bad actors anyway and got what was coming to them." For such persons considerations of legality did not count at all. They did not care whether Sacco and Vanzetti had murdered the Brockton paymaster; they knew they were alien radicals and deserved to die. "Did you see what I did to those anarchist bastards?" Judge Thayer asked. A certain number of normally mild, kindhearted, law-abiding citizens of Massachusetts saw and approved.

Then there were those who were concerned with upholding the dignity of the law. Perhaps the law had blundered. Possibly Judge Thayer had been prejudiced. But could one admit this

and thus expose the courts of Massachusetts to shame? No, it was better for a couple of Italians to die, even though they were innocent, than for law and order to be brought into disrepute. So reasoned, I suspect, Governor Fuller's committee — President Lowell of Harvard, President Stratton of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Judge Robert Grant. They favored liberty, but —.

Having understood the murder of Sacco and Vanzetti, I could no longer have any illusions about the frame-up. I stopped being surprised. Now when I go to Vermont and find a strike in progress, with a good chance that the workers will win, I am willing to bet that strikers are going to be found guilty on some charge or other. And sure enough, in the Vermont marble strike of 1935-1936, five workers were charged with assault, given six months in prison, and brought into court again on civil damage suits for large sums.

If you will look at the records of the American Civil Liberties Union, the International Labor Defense, and the National Committee for People's Rights, or at George Seldes' *You Can't Do That*, you will learn about scores of frame-ups. They range from petty charges to convictions for capital crimes. In the agricultural regions of California it is common practice for labor organizers to be arrested on charges of vagrancy and held — for the duration of the crop. "Hundreds of convictions with short terms of less than a year," says a Civil Liberties Union report, "took place in strikes all over the country." And the International Labor Defense lists more than eighty prisoners — either framed or convicted under laws that are themselves in violation of the principle of free speech — who are serving longer sentences.



I was recently discussing these matters with a friend. "But," he objected, "workers — poor people — can get justice. Look at the Scottsboro boys and Angelo Herndon."

Is justice the word for it? Nine Negro boys arrested in 1931, and seven of them convicted of rape and sentenced to death. Only prompt action saved them from immediate electrocution. For six years their trials went on, while the nine waited in prison. Appeals to the Alabama Supreme Court, to the Supreme Court of the United States. Heywood Patterson thrice condemned to death and then to seventy-five years' imprisonment. Wade Wright urging jurors "to show them Jew money cain't buy Alabama justice." Judge Callahan instructing jurors to believe a discredited witness. Finally, four of the boys freed and five — with exactly the same evidence against them — left in jail, one under sentence of death.

But even this parody of justice would have been denied the Scottsboro boys if thousands and thousands of workers had not contributed their money to pay for lawyers and to cover the costs of appeal. Otherwise the Scottsboro boys would have been like the scores of Negroes — nobody knows how many — who have been executed or lynched because a charge of rape was made.

Angelo Herndon, young Negro Communist and leader of a demonstration of the unemployed, would have fared no better without the support of militant workers. Charged with "inciting to insurrection" under the slave law of 1866, he was sentenced to from eighteen to twenty years on the chain gang. After a costly and unsuccessful appeal to the Georgia Supreme Court, \$15,000 bail was raised in three weeks by the International Labor Defense through loans from more than

eight hundred individuals and organizations. The Supreme Court, in a six to three decision based on a technicality, upheld the sentence. A drive was launched for two million signatures on a petition to Governor Talmadge, and a new appeal made. At last, nearly five years after his arrest, Angelo Herndon was freed by the Supreme Court. Four justices dissented.

These are the big cases. What about the little ones? A friend of mine talked the other day to the mayor of a New England city. He said something like this: "The Jones strike has been going on for six weeks. You've had a dozen cops on the job, and the toughest cops in the city. They've made two arrests, and they've been pretty free with their clubs. You've always had the reputation in this city of being fair with labor. What's the idea?"

The mayor replied: "I'll tell you the truth. Jones is a great friend of Mike's. You know me; I'm loyal. Mike made me what I am. I'll do anything he tells me. Mike says, 'Give 'em the works.' So I'm giving 'em the works."

Last fall I clipped from the New York *Times* a story from Atlanta, Georgia. It seems that farmers in Warren County were paying Negro cotton pickers forty cents a hundred pounds. Glascock County farmers came to these pickers and offered them seventy-five cents. Thereupon the Warren County employers, armed with guns and "firing a few shots into the air just to show that they meant business," stood guard over the pickers, with the approval of the sheriff. "Meanwhile," the dispatch continues, "in Macon, sixty-nine more laborers on Works Progress Administration payrolls were requisitioned to begin picking cotton in Bibb County fields or face permanent release from relief rolls."

These Negroes, by the way, were probably unable to vote, since more than four million Negroes have been disfranchised by laws passed in the southern states. Negroes throughout the South are consistently paid less than whites, who are paid little enough. Their children are given only the poorest kind of education. They are constantly discriminated against under Jim Crow laws, receive scant justice in the courts, and have to submit to expressions of prejudice and contempt. In the North, where discrimination is less systematic, they are usually given lower wages, and, though they are segregated in the less desirable portions of cities, they are charged excessive rents.

A good deal of slavery still exists, and not only among Negroes but also among whites — for example, those who live in company towns. Yet these are facts that I seldom see discussed in editorials on liberty.

Liberty, I sometimes suspect, does not mean quite the same to most editorial writers as it does to the rest of us. I am constantly reading about menaces to freedom of the press. The National Recovery Administration, we were told, endangered freedom of the press; and the child labor amendment, and the Newspaper Guild.

When the Newspaper Guild was founded, we were informed that reporters could not be free men if they were organized. Then, in 1936, when the Guild voted to affiliate with the A.F. of L., it was suddenly discovered that freedom of the press had somehow been perfectly safe so long as the Guild was independent, but would be jeopardized by the alliance with other unions. In 1937, however, affiliation with the A.F. of L. was virtually a bulwark of newspaper liberties,

whereas an alliance with the C.I.O. would undermine the Constitution.

What one increasingly realizes is that anything that threatens the profits of the newspaper owners menaces the freedom of the press. Yet liberals are sometimes deceived by editorial eloquence. In the fall of 1937, speaking at Williamstown, Massachusetts, Oswald Garrison Villard expressed his regret that the Guild was demanding a closed shop. During a long life Mr. Villard has demonstrated his genuine eagerness for free newspapers, and he was careful in what he said to make clear that the publishers constituted a greater obstacle to freedom than the employees, however organized.

But his remarks were picked up by Wilbur Forrest, executive assistant editor of the New York *Herald Tribune*. "I think," said Mr. Forrest, "the injection of the closed shop into newspapers would be a bad thing, and I am delighted to find that Mr. Villard thinks so too." So long, Mr. Forrest assured the audience, as the Guild was merely concerned with raising the economic standards of the profession, he — and, by implication, other publishers — could not possibly object to it. "But for the Guild to inject the closed shop means that, perhaps unknowingly, you will inject into newspaper writing, unconsciously and between the lines, a pro-labor view."

It is no wonder that Mr. Villard did his best to dissociate his position from Mr. Forrest's. Mr. Villard, after all, has commented again and again on the fact that, in most newspapers, an anti-labor view is injected, quite consciously and not merely between the lines. With all this Mr. Forrest has never once been concerned. But suddenly, confronted by the



possibility of the closed shop, he discovers that freedom of the press and democracy itself are in danger.

Once, in a public address, I asserted that the press is not free, that most newspapers color their columns in accordance with the interests of the owners, which are the same as the interests of other kinds of owners. After I had finished, a young woman in the audience heatedly stated that she had been a newspaperwoman for five years and had never seen the slightest evidence of distortion.

Half a dozen persons rose to tell of specific incidents of suppression, and the young woman said nothing more. After the meeting I asked her what kind of work she had done, and she told me that she had been society reporter on a local paper. I suggested that her kind of reporting was not likely to raise important issues, and asked her how she would explain the stories that had been told that evening.

"Oh," she said, "those were controversial matters. . . ."

The kind of news that the Chicago *Tribune* gives its readers has long been notorious. In its account of the 1937 Memorial Day massacre, for example, it reported that "a mob armed with revolvers" marched on the factory and "began firing on the bluecoats" — though not a policeman was shot. It stated that, according to the confession of "one of the wounded rioters," the strikers had been drilled for two days "in twenty-four platoons of twenty-four men each" — though no confession was ever produced in court. It called the citizens who held a protest meeting "assistant Communists" — though some of Chicago's leading clergymen were among them.

And this is the paper that recently published an advertisement saying: "The full power of official Washington is used

to suborn and coerce Washington correspondents. The first purpose of a bureaucracy being to perpetuate itself, the aim is to veil the increasing seizure of tyrannical power. . . . When you read the news of Washington in the *Chicago Tribune* . . . you get the news which Washington censors would kill or color."

All this, as I have said, is as familiar to Oswald Garrison Villard as to any man in the country. Yet at the Williamstown Institute of Public Relations he chose to attack the hypothetical danger of the closed shop rather than the real and unmistakable danger of capitalist control. The Guild does not attempt to dictate the hiring policies of the owners. It merely says, when it can get the closed shop, that a man who is hired will have to join. Thus it protects the economic gains it has made. Thus it thwarts such a policy as that adopted by a local publisher, who made new employees agree secretly not to join the Guild. There is no menace to freedom here, but there is a danger to profits.

Mr. Villard's somewhat inglorious performance at Williamstown reminds me of similar exploits performed by other men whose good intentions and high ideals are beyond question. At the 1936 convention of the American Association of University Professors, Chancellor S. T. Capen of the University of Buffalo, said, "If the academic profession, or any considerable part of it, decides to cast its lot with organized labor, then it becomes a partisan." Chancellor Capen, so far as I know, has never questioned the right of a college trustee to belong to a chamber of commerce or any other employers' association. Trustees, apparently, are in some mysterious way free from danger of partisanship, but teachers are weak and must be protected.

Mr. Villard found himself in strange company at Williamstown. Chancellor Capen might be amazed at hearing his words unctuously repeated by trustees engaged in garrotting any semblance of freedom on the campus. Senator Wheeler cannot have felt wholly at ease when he received the grateful thanks of Wall Street for his opposition to President Roosevelt's Supreme Court bill. Senator Nye must be a little embarrassed by Tom Girdler's wholehearted approval of his views on the National Labor Relations Board. Amos Pinchot, unless he is less ingenuous than I think, must have been struck by the fact that the most reactionary papers in the country published his letters to the President on the dangers of dictatorship.

But I am not very much concerned about these so-called liberals. We can grant their sincerity and try to convince them of their mistakes. When, however, their arguments are repeated by the great newspaper owners, great industrialists and bankers, machine politicians, and managers of strike-breaking agencies, there is nothing for us to do but hold our noses and keep our eyes open.

Last summer a newspaper in a nearby city carried on a vigorous campaign against the Black-Connery wages and hours bill, which it called "a thoroughly obnoxious piece of legislation." Of course the editor was not opposed to improving the conditions of labor. "Passage by Congress," he said, "of a sound bill to insure living wages to America's underpaid workers, to establish shorter hours for overworked toilers and to guarantee fair working conditions to industrial employees would be deeply satisfying to the people of this country." But the Black-Connery bill wouldn't do because it would, the editor insisted, give five men the power "to rule the industrial, business, and economic life of a free people."

I read several editorials in this paper on the wages and hours bill, and it struck me that the editor would always, in theory, be in favor of raising wages and shortening hours, and would always, in practice, oppose any measure that sought to bring this about.

And I recall that our editor has always come to the defense of liberty whenever liberty and profits went hand in hand. He was opposed to the National Industrial Recovery Act, not, to be sure, because it would benefit labor, but because it gave the government dictatorial powers. He attacked the Supreme Court bill, not because he wanted an unchanged court to declare New Deal measures unconstitutional, but because the measure smacked of tyranny. He criticizes the National Labor Relations Board, speaking, of course, as a stalwart champion of labor against the onslaughts of bureaucrats and agitators.

This editor, when I was dismissed, approved the action of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. "There is a lot of hooey about freedom," he wrote, "chiefly coming from those who do not mean freedom but license." The dismissal of a professor, the beating of strike pickets, the breaking up of a meeting — these are acts protecting liberty against license. What really endangers liberty is the National Labor Relations Board or the Newspaper Guild.

We would not have to worry about this newspaper if it were not so completely representative. There was a time when the muckrakers were eager to show how Big Business, through advertising, controlled the newspapers. Today it is clear that the influential newspapers are Big Business. They do not have to be controlled because their interests are largely



identical with those of industry and finance. A newspaper proprietor, for example, with the far-ranging investments of William Randolph Hearst or Robert R. McCormick or Ogden Reid does not have to be told by Wall Street what he should or should not print.

We have also seen that our educational institutions are by no means so free as we should like to believe. It is true that there are conspicuous examples of academic freedom, but one has only to be a teacher to realize how exceptional they are. And in addition to the hold that businessmen have over endowed colleges, through their trusteeships, there is the fact that they can usually, through their political influence, dictate the policies of public institutions. Ever since the war, for example, there has been a great deal of compulsory patriotism, which not only works an injustice on various small religious sects but helps to create an atmosphere of repression and near-hysteria. Loyalty oaths for teachers have the same results. Some states and cities have passed laws against teachers' unions. Political control of textbooks is common, and in many school systems teachers have to struggle against the boss and his machine.

The instruments by which public opinion is shaped are largely in the hands of a small minority. This is as true, for example, of the radio as it is of the newspapers. The very nature of broadcasting in this country, with the tremendous expenses involved, automatically favors persons of wealth. Henry Ford can secure a national hook-up every Sunday evening, can pay for a fine symphony orchestra and noted soloists, and can thus persuade large numbers of persons to listen to W. J. Cameron's propaganda for capitalism. Commem-

tators such as Boake Carter and Edwin C. Hill, who generally have the employers' point of view in any labor controversy, have no trouble in securing sponsors. Nineteen-twentieths of the large stations' time on the air is at the disposal of the privileged minority. Not that they are foolish enough to make propaganda all that time; they only need to see that the right word is spoken at the right moment.

They also make sure that the wrong word is not spoken. In 1935 the Crosley station, WLW, issued this order: "No reference to strikes is to be made on any news broadcasts from this station." WLW also prevented William Papier, speaking on a program sponsored by the Department of Education of the State of Ohio, from even suggesting labor's side of the struggle with capital. Forty-four of California's forty-five stations refused Upton Sinclair time on the air when he was running for governor in 1934. In March, 1936, the Yankee Network refused to carry Earl Browder's speech, though the next night it carried Hamilton Fish's answer. Alexander Woollcott was taken off the air by his sponsors because he would not agree to omit references to Hitler and Mussolini.

How deliberately and systematically employers use the various resources for shaping public opinion is suggested by the accomplishments of the National Association of Manufacturers. This organization, in which five thousand individualistic businessmen cooperate, sent its industrial press service in 1936 to 5,300 weekly newspapers, and its articles by well-known economists to 260 dailies. The cartoons it supplied free appeared in 309 dailies and 2,000 weeklies. In addition it sent a monthly bulletin to every editor in the country, translated its weekly releases for the benefit of the foreign-language

press, and paid for advertisements in 500 papers. It also broadcast "The American Family Robinson" over more than two hundred stations, and produced programs in six languages over 79 stations. It distributed two ten-minute films, seen by more than two million people, held seventy public meetings, distributed eleven million leaflets in the pay envelopes of the firms that belong to it, and sent more than a million copies of a series of seven pamphlets to libraries and colleges. In 1937 and 1938 it added to this program an extensive plan of billboard advertising.

This suggests the scale on which business operates in the propaganda field. And organized propaganda is insignificant when compared with the informal and often even unconscious manipulation of public opinion that goes on, day after day, in newspapers, on the air, and in classrooms.

But Big Business does not rely on propaganda alone. If it did, it might, in spite of its advantages, be easier to combat. It has other and more dangerous weapons.

One liberty that Big Business seldom shows any enthusiasm for is the liberty of workers to organize. When it comes to bargaining with his boss, the individual worker is powerless. In these days of mass production he can easily be replaced, and there are plenty of jobless men to accept whatever conditions are offered. The individual worker must take what he can get.

But organized workers can meet an employer on something like equal terms. They can demand better wages and shorter hours, and, if their demands are refused, they can make the employer suspend operations and lose money.

Therefore the average businessman fights unionization on

all fronts and with every available weapon. The first thing he does is to try to prevent his men from getting together and discussing the possibility of a union. To accomplish this, he may incite foreign-born against native-born, whites against Negroes, Jews against Gentiles, Catholics against Protestants, thus fostering national, racial, and religious prejudices to prevent unity among the workers.

Or, as we have seen, he may go to a strikebreaking agency and hire spies to mingle with his men. A large corporation may hire hundreds of these spies, so many that it has to hire other spies to spy on them. If they cannot prevent the formation of a union, they can try to wreck it, and, indeed, the La Follette Committee discovered that scores of spies were serving as union officers and engaging in sabotage.

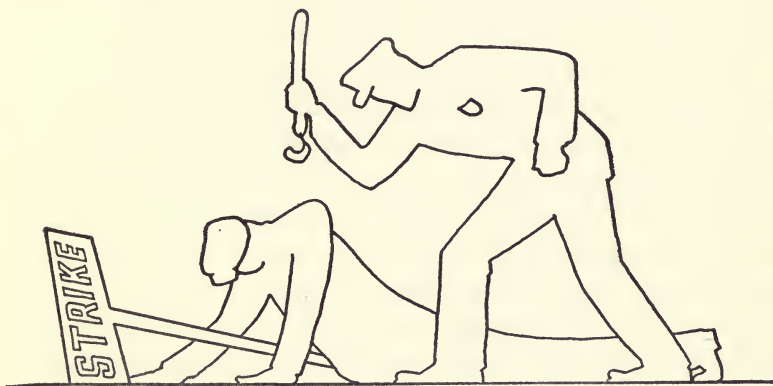
If the union survives and a strike is called, the employer may turn to the same agency for scabs. He will hire these men, not because they can run his machines for him but because they are handy with clubs and blackjacks and even guns. The agency, in fact, will be glad to arm its thugs, if the employer can get them sworn in as deputies, with machine guns and poison gas.

If the local authorities are at all cooperative — and the employer is likely to have had some voice in their selection — he can have policemen, instead of thugs that he has to pay. A friendly judge issues a sweeping injunction, and as a result there is little a striker can do without arousing in a policeman suspicions strong enough to warrant the use of a billy. When enough heads have been cracked, the employer can reopen his plant.

Even without an injunction police can do a great deal.



In Chicago's Memorial Day massacre, striking employees of Tom Girdler's Republic Steel, engaged in peaceful picketing, approached the plant and were met by hundreds of police. While strike leaders protested their right to picket, a police captain, speaking in a voice that only a fraction of them could hear, warned the workers to disperse. Immediately thereafter the police charged, releasing poison gas, clubbing men and women, and firing their revolvers. Ten persons died as a result of wounds received.



This is a newspaperman's summary of the Paramount newsreel that was taken on the spot: "Suddenly, without apparent warning, there is a terrific roar of pistol shots, and men in the front ranks of the marchers go down like grass before a scythe. . . . Two to four policemen are seen beating one man. . . . Quickly the bluecoats close in and the nightsticks fly — above his head, from the sides, from the rear. His upraised arms fall limply under flailing blows, and he slumps to the ground in a twisting fall, as the clubs con-

tinue to rain on him. . . . A man shot through the back is paralyzed from the waist. . . . The scene shifts to the patrol wagons in the rear. Men with bloody heads, bloody faces, bloody shirts, are being loaded in. The camera shifts back to the central scene. Here and there is a body sprawled in what appears to be the grotesque indifference of death. . . . A policeman makes motions of dusting off his hands and strides away. The film ends."

The Cook County coroner's jury decided that the police acted in self-defense. Many of the surviving strikers were found guilty of "conspiracy to commit an illegal act."

In the same strike Carl Meyers, Republic's manager in the Ohio district, sent for Chief Switter of the Massillon police. According to Switter's testimony before the Labor Relations Board: "Meyers wanted to know what the hell was going on over there — letting those hoodlums run the town. He wanted to know why we hadn't done like the Chicago police had done. They knew how to handle a situation, he said. He told me that if the mills closed down Massillon would be nothing but a junction point, with no need for a mayor or a chief of police or any other city officials."

A Law and Order League, obviously a creature of Republic Steel, appeared on the scene and urged Switter to commission extra policemen, offering to pay and equip them. General Marlin, of the Ohio National Guard, advised the chief to accept the offer. Republic Steel officials showed Switter a list of "loyal" company employees, and proposed that the new policemen be chosen from it.

After resisting for a few days, while the strongest pressure was exerted on him and on the mayor, Switter swore in

thirty or forty Republic employees as policemen. On the evening of July 11, fifteen or twenty of these special police fired on strikers in front of their headquarters, killing two and wounding fifteen.

If police are not sufficiently effective, there is always the possibility of being able to persuade a governor to call out the National Guard, and National Guardsmen have their instructions. In 1935 the War Department issued a booklet called "Basic Field Manual; Volume VII, Military Law; Part 3, Domestic Disturbances." Obviously intended to guide conduct in strikes, this pamphlet details the proper use of guns, poison gas, and even artillery. "Blank cartridges," it says, "should never be used against a mob, nor should a volley be fired over the heads of the mob even if there is little danger of hurting persons in rear. Such things will be regarded as an admission of weakness, or as an attempt to bluff, and may do much more harm than good."

There are many methods that employers can use. Henry Ford, for example, has his "service men," who not only spy upon and bully his employees but also are used to break up attempts at unionization. On May 26, 1937, a group of organizers for the United Automobile Workers, having received permission from the Dearborn City Council to distribute leaflets, went to the Ford plant. Told that they were trespassing on company property, they started to leave, but were set upon by more than one hundred men.

"I hadn't taken three steps," Richard Frankenstein said, "when I felt a crack in the back of the neck. I turned around and as I turned more blows were struck. . . . I was knocked down, but someone grabbed my coat from the back and threw

it over my head. They knocked me down again, turned me over on my side and began to kick me in the stomach. When I would protect my side they would kick my head. . . . I was no sooner on my feet than they would knock me down again. This went on about five times. . . . They pulled my legs apart and kicked me in the scrotum. By this time they had driven me to the steps, leading down on the east side of the bridge. As I started down the first step I was again knocked down. They picked me up and bounced me from one step to the next. I was bounced on each step. . . . I lost consciousness while on the bridge, but when they stood me on my feet it seemed to restore my faculties. . . . They said, 'Go get your coat.' . . . As I went to pick up my coat I was again knocked down. That was the last time that I was knocked down. . . . During this time the Dearborn police who were present made no effort to forestall this action."

Mr. Ford gave out the report that the beating had been administered by loyal workers of the plant. However, in a photograph taken on the spot you can see that one of the men engaged in beating an organizer has handcuffs in his back pocket, and handcuffs are not part of the ordinary automobile worker's equipment.

Note that the Dearborn police stood by and did nothing to stop the beating. Perhaps the organizers were lucky: if they had been in Jersey City, the police would have joined in the attack.

This unhappy city, which has achieved notoriety through the acts and utterances of Mayor Frank Hague, boss of New Jersey and a member of the National Democratic Committee, has become a conspicuous — though not a unique —



example of business-government cooperation against labor. The mayor, who has made a fortune in ways that are dark but not inscrutable, has been expressing his gratitude to his business associates by protecting their right to pay low wages. (Many Jersey City workers get less than \$5 a week.) Under his chosen motto — "I am the law" — Hague has had his police beat, arrest, and expel organizers for the C.I.O. And when twenty-six Congressmen ventured to protest against the infringement of constitutional rights, he replied: "I can assure you that everything is under control. There is nothing for you to be disturbed about that I can see."

My radio brings into the quiet of this farmhouse many disturbing sounds — among them the voice of Mayor Hague. I heard his semi-illiterate rantings against the C.I.O. when he was addressing the mob that his political henchmen had managed to dragoon into a Jersey City hall. I heard his lies and his boasts and his threats, and I could not doubt that he was eager to stir his listeners to violence against the C.I.O.

For many years mobs, composed of businessmen, their hired thugs, and those linked to them by self-interest, with sometimes a scattering of the merely misguided, have been used to break strikes. In California's Imperial Valley, for example, in the early thirties, every known strikebreaking device was tried. Migratory workers, perhaps the lowest paid group in America, attempted again and again to organize to get more than ten or twenty cents an hour, to win some sort of stability of employment, to get out of the dirty shacks and tents in which they were herded. Criminal syndicalism laws were used against them; the guns and poison gas of local, county, and state police; and, most effective of all, mobs.

Not only were strikers beaten and shot in Imperial Valley; anyone who attempted to help them was met with the same sort of violence. In January, 1934, A. L. Wirin, attorney of the American Civil Liberties Union, was seized at a hotel in Brawley, driven twenty miles into the desert, and beaten. The following March a clergyman, a journalist, and a woman were seized in the daytime, beaten, and thrown out on the desert. Two lawyers were subsequently assaulted, and an investigating committee of the Civil Liberties Union was fired upon.

In the San Joaquin Valley, in 1933, two strikers were killed and twelve injured in a mob raid. In 1934 seventeen strike-leaders were arrested and charged with criminal syndicalism, and eight were given sentences of from one to fourteen years.

In the South, mob violence has met every attempt of farm laborers and sharecroppers to organize. In July, 1931, a mob burned down the headquarters of the Sharecroppers Union in Camp Hill, Alabama. In 1934, in Arkansas, two hundred families were driven off their farms because they belonged to the Tenant Farmers Union, four organizers were arrested, and two investigators were threatened with lynching.

The instructions to the National Guard, from which I quoted a moment ago, say that, in occupying "a center of domestic disturbance," officers should confer with the leaders of "the American Legion and other local organizations representing law and order." There are Legion posts that really believe in law and order, but Legionnaires were involved in the kidnapping of A. L. Wirin, in a raid on a radical "farm school on wheels" in South Dakota, in an attack on steel

strikers in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, and in raids on union headquarters in the 1934 textile strike.

The devotion of both the American Legion and American newspapers to law and order was indicated by an Associated Press dispatch from Seattle a year or so ago. A Workers School had just been opened when "one hundred men representing themselves as war veterans dashed in and converted it into a school of hard knocks. Swinging clubs and blackjacks, the raiders worked their way through college in short order, forcing the student body down two flights of stairs in the building. . . . Several of those majoring in the principles of capitalistic struggles fought back with their fists, but suddenly found themselves enrolled in advanced astronomy as clubs were brought down on their heads. Five alleged promoters and teachers were arrested. None of the raiders was arrested."

How are such mobs organized? The investigations of the La Follette Committee give us some idea. In 1936, when the employees of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company were on strike, C. Nelson Sparks, former mayor of Akron, spoke on the radio for the recently formed Akron Law and Order League. He said: "Help us to gang up for constitutional law and order in this wonderful city. Help us to make this Law and Order League so representative of public opinion that we can say to those out-of-town radical leaders, who have lighted the fires of discontent in this city, to get the hell out of here, and we are not going to be too much interested in the dignity of their going."

Here was an obvious call for mob violence to break a strike. What lay behind it? The competing tire companies of Akron, including Goodyear, Goodrich, and Firestone, were linked

together in the Employers' Association of Akron. This association, to which the three large corporations paid some \$30,000 a year, spent most of its income in employing the Corporations Auxiliary Company, a strikebreaking agency. The agency had for some years supplied the usual espionage and scab service, but in 1936 it convinced the Employers' Association "that the old method of using strikebreakers and violence and things of that kind to win or combat a strike were things of the past; that the way to win a strike was to organize community sentiment; that they had been very successful in handling plans of that sort." Using the radio, newspapers, and house-to-house visiting, the agency, as it subsequently boasted to a potential customer, created the Akron Law and Order League.

Indeed, there is now a systematic plan for creating vigilante committees and using them to break strikes. It is called the Rand plan, after James H. Rand, Jr., the man who first had the audacity to put the idea into print. (He modestly calls it the Mohawk Valley Formula.) To the familiar devices for strikebreaking Mr. Rand adds the "citizens committee." All the business men opposed to strikes in general are to be enlisted, and other respectable citizens are to be persuaded, by economic pressure, by threats to move the plant, and, of course, by misrepresentation of the issues, to join. The committee is supposed to hold meetings to rouse sentiment against the strike, and Mr. Rand intimates that it will do no harm if the anti-strike sentiment finds expression in action. It is bound, in fact, to find such expression if action is needed to defeat the strike.

Mr. Rand developed his formula during a strike at the



Remington Rand Company. It was immediately adopted in the Little Steel strike of the summer of 1937, and tried out in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Governor Earle had disbanded the three hundred thugs deputized by Mayor Shields. Obviously the old game was not going to work, and the new one was tried. The chairman of the Johnstown Citizens Committee was a local banker; a minister served as secretary; the guiding force was the secretary of the local chamber of commerce, through whom the Committee was in touch with John Price Jones, Inc., a professional money-raising organization with big business contacts. From the first there was plenty of money available, for, two days after it was organized, the Committee was able to run a full-page advertisement in forty leading newspapers throughout the country.

The Citizens Committee not only controlled Mayor Shields, who would scarcely have had his position if he had not been amenable to discipline; it frightened Governor Earle. With the failure of the strike, Little Steel saw its opportunity, and the Johnstown Citizens Committee grew into the Citizens National Committee. The avowed concern of the Citizens National Committee, it is almost unnecessary to say, is liberty — “the right to work.”

These tactics have been employed again and again. Just the other day a majority of the employees of the American Woolen Company in Winooski, Vermont, signed a petition for a National Labor Relations Board election. At once the businessmen were warned that, if the C.I.O. won, the mill would leave town. The mayor, an employee of the mill, began to organize sentiment. Stores refused credit to the underpaid and frequently unemployed workers. Landlords threat-

ened to dispossess their tenants. Banks talked about foreclosures. A mob surrounded the headquarters of the Textile Workers Organizing Committee. And the C.I.O. lost the election.

I sometimes wonder how the little businessmen feel when the big businessmen twist the screws. What does a small manufacturer think when he is commanded to join a vigilante outfit? Does a grocer like to be told not to give his friends credit? Is a merchant proudly conscious of his rugged individualism when he realizes that his business will be wiped out if the factory that dominates the town carries out its threat and moves away? Does it ever occur to these people that workingmen are not only their customers but also their allies?

Probably not to many of them, or vigilanteism would not be the danger that it is. For it is a danger, and one of the most serious in America today.

One day last fall I had lunch with a Roman Catholic priest who was investigating Communism and was brave enough to take a chance on eating a meal with a Red. After I had answered his questions, I tried to arouse him to a sense of the danger of Fascism. I pointed out that, even from his point of view, and granting that Communism was a menace instead of being, as I believed, our only hope, Fascism was a far more serious and immediate threat. I told him about the vigilante committees.

He smiled. "You paint a gloomy picture," he said. "But somehow we do manage to preserve a certain degree of liberty. In spite of the elaborate machinery that you describe, workers are being organized into unions, and very rapidly."

"I'm not in the least gloomy," I answered. "The business interests, with all their legal and illegal violence, have not succeeded in crushing liberty. They have taken away the liberties of a great many people, but they are far from being wholly successful. What I want you to observe is how liberty is preserved."

I know an avowed Communist whose job in a leather factory has never been threatened; he has a strong trade union behind him. If I had belonged to a militant union, I doubt if Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute would have tried to fire me. Whenever you find individuals exercising rights that are opposed to the business interests, you will find the explanation in organization.

Both the right to speak freely and the right to live decently have to be won. They are seldom conceded by those who own factories and banks. In spite of spies and scabs and thugs and vigilantes, several million American workers have been organized — by persons described in the press as "agitators." And their unions do gain a considerable measure of liberty for them, even though unceasing efforts to corrupt the leadership are sometimes successful.

But it is difficult for unions to be organized in the face of terror, especially when that terror is connived in or actually created by state or local governments. Therefore workers have to bring pressure on governments as well as employers. We have seen how rapidly unionism grows if the power of the state is not used against it. The famous Section 7A of the National Industrial Recovery Act guaranteed workers the right to organize, and the more aggressive union leaders saw the opportunity to gain millions of members. "The gov-

ernment will protect you," they told the workers. "You can't be fired for joining the union." To see what that meant to the employees of the steel, automobile, and rubber companies, look at the growth of the unions in those industries.

The N.R.A. was under constant fire from business interests, and it was finally declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Subsequently Senator Wagner's National Labor Relations Act was passed, setting up machinery to protect workers from discrimination and terror and to enable them to organize as they chose. Not only have unions grown under the N.L.R.A.; company unionism has virtually disappeared, though it would return quickly enough should the act be modified. Of course, spokesmen for Big Business, such as Senator Vandenberg, are trying to destroy the N.L.R.A., but labor is now too conscious of its political power to permit its destruction.

"This," I pointed out to the priest, "is the situation that makes the appearance of the Mohawk Valley Formula so significant. Little Steel's use of vigilanteism makes clear that industry, if it cannot gain its ends by legal means, will not hesitate to resort to organized violence outside the law. Vigilanteism is so logically the next step that the Citizens National Committee could have been predicted a year before Tom Girdler defied the Federal Government. Make no mistake: Big Business knows what it is doing."

"That's just what I doubt," said the priest. "You speak as if Big Business were an entity. It isn't. There are hundreds and thousands of businessmen, some good and some bad, some ruthless to their employees and some kindly. Even if, as you imply, the actions of each were dictated by a narrow



selfishness, the fact would remain that their interests conflict quite as often as they coincide. In other words, there's no conspiracy."

"Not exactly a conspiracy," I replied, "and yet sometimes it would be hard to find another term for it. Leo Huberman, in *The Labor Spy Racket*, tells about the National Metal Trades Association, a typical spying, strike-busting, blacklisting body. No one of the thousand-odd members of this association can settle a strike without the approval of the administrative council. That is not merely collective action; it is something close to conspiracy.

"Remember what a large proportion of the nation's industries is in the hands of a relatively small group of financiers. If you will look, for example, at Anna Rochester's *Rulers of America*, you will see what hundreds and hundreds of businesses are controlled by the Morgans, the Rockefellers, the Du Ponts, and the Mellons. With such concentration of control, you inevitably have large numbers of businessmen acting together.

"And even if there is no conspiracy, the results are the same as if there were. Businessmen did not have to get together and decide whether or not to oppose the N.R.A., the Wagner act, and the Black-Connery bill; each one knew. Mr. Rand did not have to convince Mr. Girdler of the utility of the Mohawk Valley Formula; Mr. Girdler recognized its merits at first sight, and would in all probability have used the same methods if Mr. Rand had never existed. We do not have to assume that the actions of the capitalist class are dictated by a carefully conceived policy. Despite all conflicts, the interests of members of that class, when it comes to a struggle with labor, are recognizably identical.

"That is where the danger of Fascism lies. Thus far American business interests have been willing to accept the forms of democracy. Often they have used democratic forms to achieve very undemocratic ends. Sometimes democracy has stood in their way, but it has not interfered enough with their profits to be a danger. Even now, if prosperity returns, business will be able to make large profits while granting concessions to labor, and the threat of Fascism will be postponed.

"But suppose the depression continues, and suppose the trade union movement grows even stronger. Suppose the government is enough under the influence of labor so that it refuses to help in the destruction of the unions. Can you doubt that under such circumstances powerful businessmen — men like Girdler, Weir, Ford, and dozens of others — would be willing to sink their differences and unite in backing some Fascist demagogue? In June, 1937, at a party after the Harvard-Yale boat race, a toast was drunk, 'To Tom Girdler, America's Mussolini.'"

"I think," said the priest gently, "it must have been after the fifth or sixth drink."

"But there may be truth," I replied, "even in cocktails. These were, I understand, relatively young Wall Street men, but what the young men are saying in their cups I am willing to wager the older men are thinking in their hearts."

"Even if Wall Street tried to set up a dictatorship, it couldn't succeed. Think of the American tradition of liberty."

"I do think of it, and I know that it is being abused. Every movement that makes for true freedom is being opposed by powerful interests, and opposed in the name of liberty. You can't trust in believers in 'liberty but.'"

"You yourself believe in 'liberty but,'" he reminded me.

It is true. It was a hard lesson for me to learn. After I realized how I and millions of others had been deceived during the war, I wanted absolute freedom for myself and everybody else. But I could not help seeing that there was no genuine liberty for great masses of the American people. They had certain nominal liberties, but in practice they were denied not merely the right to speak freely but also the right to live decently. And I saw that they would never be free so long as Big Business had the right to exploit them.

So I became a believer in liberty but — not for Big Business. I would like, as I have said, to see a planned economy, and this would unquestionably take away certain liberties that our businessmen now cherish. But it would mean true liberty for millions of Americans. I used to think it was a simple choice between liberty and not-liberty. Now I see, on the one hand, liberty for the few, coupled with exploitation, suffering, and slavery for the many; and, on the other, restrictions for the few and liberty, abundance, and security for the masses.

"Can you not conceive," asked the priest, "of liberty for all?"

"I can, but only after the profit system has been abolished. Under that system there is liberty for Big Business but not for the rest of us. While that system is being replaced, we will be gaining liberty and Big Business will be losing it. But after Socialism is well established, after Big Business is only a memory, liberty can become a universal possession."

"I am afraid that time is a long way off."

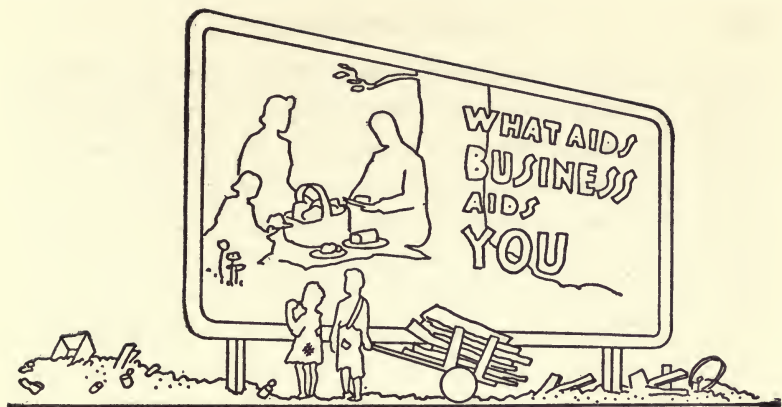
"It may be, though perhaps not so far as you think. But

it is the only way that I can see in which liberty can really be secured. And in the meantime we shall have to watch out, or those liberties we have will be taken away from us. That is something that we should both regret, and we can work together to avoid it. You know as well as I do, though your Church seems to ignore Fascism in its fight against Communism, that not merely Fascism itself but the whole familiar process of frame-ups, espionage, and vigilante violence is contrary to your ideals. You and I, I think, have more in common than you and Mayor Hague, though he happens to be of your faith. Certainly you have more in common with the workingmen for whom you say mass than you have with the boss that exploits them."

As we said good-bye, the priest once more expressed his faith in the American people. It is a faith I share. I do not believe "it" will happen here, but I know it can. When it is to the interests of the great financiers and industrialists to have Fascism, they will find a demagogue and make a try.

The only way to discourage such an attempt is to show our determination to struggle for our rights. The only way to prevent it is to take away from Big Business its power.





## XI. Without Reservation

AMERICA is still the land of opportunity. But not in the old way.

I pick up my *New York Times*, and here is an advertisement, paid for by a well-known advertising agency, spread over the back page. It tells a story.

The "Old Man" is eating his lunch of a raw apple, a bottle of milk, and some crackers, and he looks out over the factory that he has built. He sees a crowd collecting at the gate. "Presently a man who is standing on a packing case begins to wave his arms. He is a swarthy little man with a black mustache." He is, in short, an agitator, and therefore a foreigner. "It is his job to make the workers discontented with their lot."

The "Old Man" cannot hear what this alien Red is saying but he can guess. "The 'Old Man's' salary was published in yesterday's newspaper. His income runs into six figures."

The "Old Man" notices a young worker, "the son of Charlie Pedersen, a foreman in the tool room. Young Pedersen is not paying much attention to the man on the packing case. As he munches his sandwich he is thinking excitedly — 'A salary like that is something to work for! The "Old Man" started at the bottom just like me. It's ability that counts. I have ability. Some day my pay check will be as big as that!'"

The "Old Man" thinks of his own lowly beginnings. He thinks of the "humble cabin" in which he was born. "He thinks of Washington and Patrick Henry, of Jefferson and Lincoln." The agitator doesn't bother him personally, but he is worried on behalf of the young worker. "It would be too bad, the 'Old Man' thinks, if the son of Charlie Pedersen should miss the opportunity that is his by heritage. It would be too bad if America should become like other countries, so regimented and politician-ruled that it would no longer be possible for a man to toil and climb and pluck the prime fruits of reward. For then this country would cease to be — America, sweet land of Liberty."

The advertisement would be a little more realistic if it had ended with the "Old Man" becoming so distressed about Charlie Pedersen's son that, in the name of liberty, he sent out hired thugs to beat up the alien agitator — who happened to be a descendant of a *Mayflower* family and a former all-American halfback.

It would be considerably more realistic if Charlie Pedersen's son, instead of dreaming of an income in six figures, were worrying about the pay-cut that the "Old Man" had ordered that morning.

It would come closer to the truth if it told the readers that

not one family in a thousand has an income in six figures, and that Young Pedersen, with all his ambition and all his ability, would be lucky if his salary ever went above two thousand a year. It might also point out that the "Old Man," even though he had risen from poverty, would do his best to close the road to other poor boys. Indeed, taking his cue from William Rockefeller, he had already had a will prepared that tied up his fortune in a trust fund so that it would pass to his great-grandchildren, for the "Old Man," proud as he was of his own shirtsleeves, intended to take no chances of a family return to them.

It is another kind of opportunity that is open to Americans today — not opportunity for the lucky individual, but opportunity for all, if all will work together. We have a beautiful land — and a rich land. We are an intelligent, resourceful, courageous people. Traditionally our eyes are turned to the future, and quite rightly, for the future can be magnificent.

When I say I like America, I am thinking of potentialities as well as actualities. I am thinking of an America I could like — without reservation.

Imagine an America without poverty. Imagine a job for everyone and adequate pay for every job. I sit here with the sun pouring into my new study, warm and comfortable and happy. And I know that millions of people are cold. They are sitting in ramshackle houses, with the wind biting at them through a hundred crevices. They are crowded in unheated tenements that the sun, so cheerful even on a cold winter's day, cannot get at. They are huddling around stoves sparingly fed from a meager supply of coal or kept alive with scavengings from the dumps. They are walking along windy streets, in

patched shoes and threadbare coats, looking for jobs. They are running to school, running for the warmth that their shoddy coats and pants cannot give them.

Yesterday a man came out to try to sell me insurance. An elderly man, trim and respectable, he quickly abandoned his memorized sales talk, to whisper that he had heard me speak and agreed with many of my ideas. "I wish I could help you with money," he said. "I believe in the cause, and I'd like to give to it. But I have a daughter; her husband isn't much good; she's been very sick; four times in the hospital this year; at my expense." He whispered still lower: "She was in the charity ward once." Tragedy in the words, confession of failure. "But she didn't get the attention they'd have given a guinea pig. The doctor said, if I wanted her to live —."

Does it seem unreasonable for me to say that I would like America better if its people were decently housed, decently fed, decently cared for? We can produce food enough, we can build houses enough, we can train doctors enough.

Suppose I could sit here and know that what I have everyone has — and something besides, something neither you nor I can have today, economic security. It would be a better America, an America easier on the mind and conscience, an America in which I could work better, I believe, and — sleep better.

Can you imagine taking a trip through such an America? All the beauty that we love now, all the richness of historic association, all the evidence of human ingenuity and daring. But no slums, no company towns, no sharecroppers' huts. Whenever we saw a factory, we would know that the people inside had decent working conditions, adequate pay, leisure



to live in. We would know that what it produced would serve some real need. When we saw an oil well, we would know that our resources, the people's resources, were not being squandered to make someone a quick profit, but were being used scientifically, for the people's wants. When we saw a great field of corn, we would not wonder how much of it would be destroyed to bolster prices. When we came upon some estate, it would not occur to us to lament that it was paid for by hundreds of slum dwellers, for there would be no slums, and the estate itself, instead of ministering to the whims of a single family, would serve the public.

There would, you see, be no very rich people in this America. There couldn't be. People grow very rich in only one way: by making other people work for them. In the America of the future there will be no dividends, no profits, no exploitation. There will not necessarily be equality, but there will be no very rich and no poor.

I cannot lament the passing of the rich. The little good they do can be better done by society: the museums they stock, the hospitals they build, the research foundations they endow, the colleges they found — and run. And for the rest, we shall be better off without them.

A dentist's office is a good place to catch up with back reading, and not long ago, while waiting for my dentist, I found an old copy of *Fortune* with an article about the richest women in the United States. Twenty-three women in this country have fortunes of more than twenty-five million dollars. Obviously they have some trouble in spending their incomes. One has a big Manhasset place, a town house in New York, an 8,500 acre estate in Georgia. Another divides her time

between an estate in Newport and an estate in Morocco. A third has "homes" in Philadelphia, New York, Palm Beach, and Paris. A fourth has stables worth a million and a pearl necklace worth \$800,000. A fifth has a miniature palace of Versailles in Detroit and a house with gold faucets in Palm Beach. A sixth has two yachts, a ski lodge in Canada, and a string of steeplechasers. "Her extremely lavish estate on Long Island with its severe and charming Georgian house is run on the grand scale, with liveried doormen, squads of servants, and a tennis house the size of a small armory."

Ferdinand Lundberg, in *America's 60 Families*, tells how Barbara Hutton "came out" at an expense of \$100,000, only to have her party eclipsed by Helen Doherty's quarter-of-a-million affair. When Mrs. Marjorie Post Close Hutton married Joseph E. Davies, her apartment was decorated "with five thousand chrysanthemums that had been dyed blush pink at a cost of \$2,000 to match the icing on the three hundred pound wedding cake which the establishment's twenty-five servants, assisted by three caterers, served to fifty wedding guests." There are estates that cost millions of dollars, bathrooms that cost tens of thousands, three hundred- and four hundred-foot yachts, racing stables that cost as much as five million, private railway cars and even private railroads, pipe organs at two hundred thousand and up. Pierre Du Pont spent \$25,000 to have a single bush brought to Longwood, and Samuel Untermyer employed a gardening staff of 167 men.

I am not concerned with the moral aspects of great wealth, though I confess that the publicized struggle over Gloria Vanderbilt, with all its sordid implications and its pathetic

revelations, made me shiver a little. What I object to is the economic waste. In the *Fortune* article and in Lundberg's book one reads of three, four, or five estates, each with a large staff of servants. A single millionaire may have hundreds of persons on his domestic payroll — household servants, crews for his yachts, gardeners, stablemen, social secretaries. A mere whim will temporarily bring into his service thousands more — all the battalions of those who exist to please the wealthy. And all these individuals are, from the social point of view, from our point of view, doing nothing. They might just as well be engaged in counting the grains of sand on the beach.

“But,” someone objects, “the millionaire is giving these people work.” It's true, and we ought to blush to think of it. Our society can't use them; so it turns them over to some rich man to waste their talents and their energies.

In the America I am thinking of, nobody will have hundreds of servants to wait on him. And at the same time nobody will have to worry about work being given him, because there will be work for all, useful work. And if enough can be produced with less labor, people won't be unemployed; there will simply be that much more leisure for everyone. Today it would be a calamity to release hundreds of thousands of people from their bondage to the rich. Tomorrow it will be a blessing to have that many more hands to share in our work.

This is not, of course, why the individual control of great wealth has to be abolished. The real reason, as we know, is that society cannot afford to leave its destinies in the hands of a relatively few individuals. If we are to realize the promise of American life, we must distribute the abundance we can

produce, and that, as we have found, is incompatible with the private ownership of the means of production. The fact that the class of the very wealthy has to disappear in the process is only incidental.

But, as I have said, I shall not be sorry to see them go. Inevitably they do set a certain kind of standard for American life. They encourage extravagant competitive spending all down the line. They make snobbishness a virtue, and I do not like snobbishness. I am embarrassed by the servility of bell-boys and the cringing cheerfulness of railroad porters. I have worked in stores, and I know that the customer is always right — and therefore hateful. I have humbled myself before a purchaser and sneered behind his back. I shall be glad when that is a thing of the past, when self-respecting people can do necessary jobs, whatever they are, without loss of dignity.

I think we are all going to be freer and happier in this America of the future. One day last summer a friend of mine, a man who feels as I do about the possibilities of American life, came out in great distress to see me. He was at the time a small manufacturer, and he had decided to give up his business. He said he couldn't stand it.

"You don't know me," he said. "I know you think I'm a good guy. When I'm talking with you, I'm pleasant and good-natured. I make jokes. I laugh a lot. You ought to see me in the shop. If anybody speaks to me, I bite their head off. I swear at the damn girls. I yap on the telephone. I just can't stand it."

As a manufacturer he had to make a profit or lose his business. He had recognized the union, he paid higher wages than the average, he looked out for his employees. "But the



girls aren't satisfied," he said. "Oh, I know, they ought not to be. They come to me and they say, 'The base rate on these shirts ought to be three cents higher.' What can I answer? As a businessman, I ought to say, 'Look here, you take my price and you like it.' And the funny thing is, if I said that, they'd understand and respect me. But they'd bide their time, and maybe some day I'd have a strike on my hands.

"I can't just jump on them. So I say, 'Listen, girls, you know I'm treating you better than any other boss in town.' I try to sell them the idea that I'm a special kind of boss. Well, maybe I am, inside, but not so far as they're concerned. My job is to get as much out of them as possible. How can I convince them that they ought to be satisfied with a nickel more than girls in other shops get, when I know I'm not paying them enough to live on?

"So what am I going to do? I got to make a profit or I lose the business. I got to gyp the girls. But at the same time I can't let them think I'm just another bloody exploiter. So I kid them along. Then all of a sudden I get mad. I think, 'Here I am, doing everything I can for those girls and they don't appreciate it.' I swear at them and they go back to work. But they think I'm a son of a bitch, and maybe I am.

"You see, it's complicated. If I sell out, those girls will be worse off than they are now. But when I kid them along, I'm trying to get them to depend on me instead of the union. I'm hurting the union. Isn't that a joke? Secretly I'm giving money to the union, but every day I'm doing my best to hurt it. Maybe it would be better if I'd act like any other boss. But I can't do it. It's driving me nuts."

Twenty years ago I worked in a large factory that was

famous because of its labor policies. The owner, a relatively young man, had inherited the business, had not had to fight tooth and nail to build it up, and he remained an idealist. He introduced schemes of unemployment insurance, employee representation, and profit sharing. He did not pay his workmen a decent wage, but he paid them somewhat more than he actually had to.

Later on I came to know this man a little, and I learned to admire both his idealism and his intelligence. In the twenties, when people were talking about the new capitalism, I thought of him — let's call him Mr. Thompson — as the perfect example of the new, the intelligent, the socially minded capitalist. I half believed in the new capitalism because I had known Mr. Thompson.

For five or six years I saw nothing of him. Then one day in 1930 or 1931 I met him at a railroad station, and we had a minute to talk. I said, "How are things going?" He shook his head somberly and answered, "I've had to do some very un-Thompsonian things."

I got on the train, and I've never seen him since, but that phrase has stuck in my mind. He'd tried to be decent. Then the depression had come along. I suppose he'd had to lay off a lot of people, so many that the schemes of unemployment insurance broke down. There weren't any profits to share, I imagine, for his plan guaranteed a certain rate of interest to investors, and it was the surplus that was to be divided among the workers. Maybe the employee councils folded up too; they couldn't have amounted to much at a time when the factory was running at a quarter of its productive capacity.

It wasn't his fault. Oh, I know he still managed to live in

what must have seemed to his workers a magnificent fashion, but it wouldn't have done any good if he'd sold his nice house and given up his autumn hunting trips and taken his children out of college. That wouldn't have put people to work or even materially increased the average wage.

It wasn't his fault, and I could see that he was really hurt. He had been beaten by something bigger than himself, something that wouldn't let him be decent. He had been forced to be "un-Thompsonian," to be not himself, to be just like other businessmen, of whose greedy ruthlessness he had always been contemptuous. It hurt, but he couldn't help it.

Lincoln Steffens, a long time ago, wrote a story called "The Reluctant Briber." The head of a big corporation sent for him. This man had built up a railroad, and in the process had done his share of bribing. Then one day his son, who had been reading the papers, asked him if the stories about him were true. He was honest enough to admit they were, and then and there he resolved to stop buying legislators. He tried, and all that happened was that other companies paid for and got the special privileges his company needed. His board of directors jumped on him, and so did the bankers with whom he did business. He realized that he could do one of two things — retire or go on bribing.

Steffens told him he couldn't beat the system alone. He could get out of it, in which case the bribery would go right on, or he could stay in and do the bribing himself. Bribery could only be eliminated when the system was changed.

That didn't satisfy the man. It was a personal question with him, a moral question. So Steffens told him how to be honest — at least with himself. He told him to do his own bribing,

not hire someone else to do it. And he told him to stand up in front of his mirror every night and say: "I, James J. Jamison, an important man with an important soul, I have this day bribed (say) ten legislators. That's a crime and I'm a criminal. Bribery is a felony whether the felon is caught or not; so I am a felon. But felonies don't matter. They are only the means to the real wrong, which is to get something for nothing — a lot of money for a little bad service. So I'm not only a crook, but a hog. And that isn't the worst of it. I'm an able, intelligent, leading citizen, trusted with all sorts of power, and yet I'm engaged, systematically, in undermining the foundations of the State and rotting all the institutions of the society in which my children and their children, in which the children of the American people for generations, shall have to grow up compromisers, slaves, cowards. That is what I am; that is what I'm doing."

You see Steffens' point? The economic system made this man a crook. The best he could do was to save himself from also being a hypocrite.

Now if you can estimate the number of men who would have the courage to follow Steffens' prescription, you can decide how free the business world is from hypocrisy. For it isn't only a matter of bribing legislators. Competition, which the defenders of the capitalist system admire so much, is a matter of getting the best of other people. For a while the game may be played according to polite rules, but sooner or later the rules are forgotten.

From the point of view of human character, the worst of it is, as Steffens realized, that people have to deceive themselves. They have to find excuses. So they start blaming everything,



not on the system, which they don't want to change, but on human nature, which, they are quick to tell you, can't be changed.

One day last spring, as I was going to New York on the train, a pleasant-faced man came and sat beside me. After lighting a cigar, he opened his paper, and then, putting it down, turned suddenly to me and said, "The last time I saw you, you were giving five dollars to Spain."

"Ten," I said, and smiled.

We discussed the Spanish meeting, my experiences at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and then books. He talked about Proust, Joyce, Dos Passos, and Dostoyevsky, and talked well. After a time we came to politics.

"People are corrupt," he said, "and you can't do anything about it. In thousands and thousands of years you can't do anything about it. I know there are injustices under our system, but there are injustices under every system, and always will be. Human nature is bad."

We separated at Grand Central, but I continued to think about our conversation. Here was a man of sensitive tastes and good impulses. He knew and appreciated what was sound and good in mankind. And yet he insisted that human nature is vile.

After I returned home, I made inquiries about my acquaintance of the train, and learned that he was engaged in practices that, keeping just within the letter of the law, obviously transgressed its spirit and were in flat violation of any decent humanitarian feeling. When he had first opened his law office, he had had a hard time. Then a rather shady corporation, feeding on all the weaknesses of the poor, made him an offer.

He accepted it, lending his talents to the grossest kind of exploitation, and he has lived well ever since. He can read Proust and Joyce and even afford to collect first editions in a small way. But he cannot afford to have a good opinion of human nature.

That kind of corruption of human personality, of good human material, goes on all the time. Speaking of Steffens reminds me of the sensation that he and the other muckrakers made some thirty years ago. Do you suppose you could create a sensation today by exposing municipal graft? I have had friends tell me about the political setup in a city near here. They tell just how the machine works, how it is tied up with the houses of prostitution and the gambling places, how much this contractor cleaned up and what that politician got as his rake-off. Never has one of these friends shown the least indignation. They have been a little irritated, perhaps, but more often amused, and sometimes frankly envious. One or two may have been distressed. But they have never been indignant. How could they be? Corruption is something one has to take for granted — like mud on country roads in springtime.

Think of the cynicism this reveals. What can you tell a child about honesty? I have been shocked — and I am naïve enough to confess it — by stories of wholesale cheating in high schools. I have been shocked when I found my own students standing in themes they had copied from books. But what can you expect? Children are not stupid. They know that adults are constantly evading laws, and find it profitable to do so. They learn, while they're still young, that business as a rule is not on the up-and-up. They adopt, in other words, the ethics of the capitalist system, and it's not altogether easy to

condemn them for doing so. I am afraid a child with a sensitive conscience is rather badly adapted to life as it is led in our society.

How can you urge a child to tell the truth when one of the first things you have to teach him is that advertisements lie? Some breakfast food, he reads, will make him successful in his games and studies. You have to explain to him that it's not so, that this preparation, which sells for ten or twenty times what it's worth, will do no more for him than any other cereal. He finds, in the midst of his favorite comic strips, pictures of famous athletes who endorse a particular cigarette, and he hears on the radio movie stars speaking with equal enthusiasm of another brand. You have to tell him that these endorsements are simply bought and sold and bear no relation to the real opinions of the athletes and the actors.

You have to make it clear, indeed, that lying is a major American industry. You have to be emphatic about this to protect the child against a host of fears — fear of body odor, fear of constipation, fear of sleeplessness. And against a host of frauds — medicines that are useless or positively harmful, expensive and worthless toilet articles, and the little selling schemes that thrive on childish gullibility. You have to counteract the snobbishness that advertising so carefully inculcates. You have to make it plain that the world of advertising is a make-believe world, a comedy world, that in real life a girl doesn't get a husband because she uses a particular kind of hand lotion, and a man doesn't make a fortune because he deals with a particular tailor. But you cannot let it go at that, for the comedy has a serious purpose, and the make-believe is in earnest, and they add up to — lying for profit.

I should like America better if it gave people a chance to be honest. I am not trying to tell you that everything would be perfect if we did away with the profit system. I can't promise you that everyone will be fine and honorable and truthful. But I know the man I talked with on the railroad train is wrong. People aren't all bad. They can be pretty bad if they're pushed that way, but they also can be pretty good if they have a chance.

In fact, I'm amazed at how much goodness there is in people even in a system that puts a premium on badness. It's striking to see how generous we can be when our imaginations are touched by a great emergency, a flood, say, or a fire. It's encouraging to see how much sheer heroism there is, how people will forget their own skins and risk their lives for others. I know plenty of dishonest people, but I know few who seem to enjoy their dishonesty, and even they might have been all right if they'd been caught young enough.

If people are as good as this when it pays to be bad, what mightn't we expect of them if the incentive to disloyalty and dishonesty could be taken away? I have known a man to go out of his way to help me when I was in trouble, and then try to cheat me out of three cents on an order of groceries. I'd trust that man in a cooperative society, and I'd trust myself, though I've done my share of dishonest things.

One reason why I like America is that I like its people. Some of them have probably been hopelessly spoiled by the system of special privileges. I wouldn't expect much, for instance, from the lady with the gold water faucets. But the average American is all right. All he needs is a chance, and that's what I want him to have.

Have you ever noticed how many books there are on the



market that offer paths to self-improvement? They sell like hot cakes, though most of them are unmitigated frauds. Of course the appeal is often to our old friend, the desire for profit. But it isn't only that. Advertising men think that people buy sets of the classics because they expect that reading them — or perhaps just owning and exhibiting them — will lead to promotion or social prestige. That isn't the only reason. People, lots of people, have an almost pathetic longing to grow. They want to get ahead, no doubt, and they're not to be blamed for that, but they also want to develop capacities that they feel are lying within them.

Sometimes workers write me. A seventy-year-old Polish mechanic types, with obvious difficulty, a long letter on the relation of science to social reform. A Vermont farmer, having read a novel because of my review, takes me to task for recommending it. A jobless Armenian asks me if he would be a traitor to the working class if he opened a little store with some money his wife had inherited. A teamster in the Middle West has written a novel and wants me to read it.

All around me I see talents going to waste, talents that America needs. A country mechanic, a Jack-of-all-trades, comes in to do a job for us. A quiet fellow, rather shy, he moves quickly about the house, intent on his work. We talk to him and learn that he spent a few weeks at a training school, couldn't get a job, came home. He wanted to be an engineer, but that was impossible from the first. His hands are busy as he talks, but his face is eager, and he has forgotten his shyness. He could have gone to college and become an engineer, and America could have used him. In our America he would have his chance.

Here in the country we see some sorry spectacles. Country

people do not hide their shame, and the feeble-minded and the twisted of body are constantly before their eyes. These a better America would take out of their squalor, would surround with comfort and aid with all the resources of science. But these are not the neighbors who touch my imagination most. I want them to have the best that society can give, but my concern is with those who can give something to society.

And I see plenty of them. If in the country one gets to know the helpless and hopeless, one also learns that Thomas Gray was not purely romantic when he wrote of mute, inglorious Miltons and village-Hampdens. One day last winter I stopped at a farmhouse to buy eggs. The farmer was laid up with grippe, and he called to me from his bedroom. He had, he told me, been listening to the radio, and had heard a broadcast from the United States Mint. He wanted to know how the government put currency into circulation, and began to tell me his conception of the process, amazingly correct, as he had worked it out lying in bed. We went on to talk about the function of money, the regulation of currency, and the danger of inflation. His thinking was not based on adequate knowledge, but it was straight, clear thinking.

Another neighbor is well over seventy, but he does all the work on a good-sized farm, and there is a spring in his walk that is exciting to watch. He loves to talk, if he can work at the same time, and he has told me about his boyhood, how he left home against his father's will, what he did in New York, why he came back. All the reading he has time for is the daily newspaper, but he has a lively, speculative mind, and I have heard him, starting from some item in the day's news, develop theories on crime and punishment or the causes of

war that were not borrowed but grew out of his own thoughtfulness.

I am not suggesting that, in the America of the future, such persons will be professional economists or poets or statesmen. They are good workmen, and the country will need good workmen. But their other talents will be given a chance to express themselves. They will have training, encouragement, leisure. I see no reason why a farmer or a workman, while functioning on his farm or in his factory, should not also contribute to poetry or economics or philosophy. And the arts and sciences might be a good deal better off.

At a meeting I recently attended, an engineer and inventor rose during the question period and made a plea for attention to the lone creative worker, laboring in the silence of the night to benefit humanity. The speaker replied: "I am willing to pay tribute to your lone creative worker, but I cannot forget that there are creative powers in all men. Let us honor the creator by all means, but let us work to build a society in which all men can be creators."

Sometimes, when I talk about the kind of America I would really like, somebody says, "But in such a perfect society, wouldn't everyone be dreadfully bored?"

It is a question that makes me very angry. The questioner, I notice, is usually a person of comfortable means, and it never occurs to him to starve for the sake of a little excitement. He is, indeed, quite likely to comment at some other moment on the dullness of the poor. What he really means, I am afraid, is that, in a moderately just and equitable society, he would have no sense of superiority.

But, if we choose to take the question at all seriously, we

find that it is easily answered. I am not talking about Utopia. I am talking about a society in which there will be all sorts of serious problems. In taking production and distribution into our own hands, instead of leaving them to the vagaries of the profitmakers, we will find that our hands are full. We shall be creating our own destiny, and it will take all the wisdom and determination we can muster.

Moreover, even when we get this planned society of ours really working, we will find that there are plenty of worlds yet to conquer. For countless centuries the majority of the human race have worked to get enough food so as to have energy to work to get enough food — and so forth. Many have suspected that life might contain more than this routine, and some few — statistically very few indeed — have been able to get beyond it. It is their accomplishments that history has cherished. Their lives have suggested to us what life might be. What we visualize is not cessation of effort, but effort on a new level, not uniformity, but richer and richer variety. Once the foundations were laid, we might, indeed, have a civilization worthy of the name.

I should like to travel in the new America, and there are three places in particular that I should like to visit. First, there is a textile town in New England, where I spent a little time at the height of the depression. I remember old, dark, unsanitary factories, most of them idle, some with their windows broken. I remember little groups of people in front of stores and on corners, young people many of them, who shifted their feet uncomfortably in the November slush, and every once in a while looked, angrily and yet anxiously, at the black, silent factories. I remember the rows of company



houses, not quite so bleak as those of the Pennsylvania coal patch, but all alike, all painted a dingy gray, all narrow, jerrybuilt, ugly. And I remember that some of those houses were empty, because their tenants had been evicted.

Then I recall a corner of Iowa as I saw it in 1933, just after the farm holiday. We drove all day on muddy roads, stopping at this farm and that. We saw miles of rich land under cultivation, sturdy houses, finely equipped barns, the best of farm machinery. And we talked with miserably unhappy people. Farm after farm had been taken over by the banks, and most of the others were threatened with foreclosure. Because it was raining, the farmers were working around their barns, tinkering with machines that were no longer theirs, looking after stock that they could not call their own. Some were defiant and told us with pride how they had taken out a foreclosing judge and put a rope around his neck, and how they had been herded by the National Guard into barbed wire bullpens. Others were simply bewildered and desperate.

Then I think of a steel town in Pennsylvania as I saw it not many months ago. Few things can more effectively fill the onlooker with pride in human achievement than a steel mill. The great black mass, at first glance dingy and foreboding, reveals human audacity and ingenuity as a skyscraper does or an air liner. The towering blast furnaces, with their unfathomable coils of pipes, the beautiful flow of metal, the bubbling lake of slag; the open hearths, into which, given glasses, I looked to see violet mists rising from a violet whirlpool; the rolling mill, tossing great ingots about, shaping them, rolling them into glowing ribbons, cutting them into lengths, loading

them on waiting freight cars — these things are a token and a proof of what man can do.

Even the most ignorant visitor, feeling at first that he is confronting chaos, soon sees order. Every process is co-ordinated with all the others; every by-product is used. And yet, the day I was there, only one blast furnace out of six was working. These great resources, so carefully planned to avoid waste, were being wasted, and hundreds of men, out of work, were counting their pennies. Not long before, this mill had been busy — with war orders. The management was eagerly seeking — for more war orders. Only the threat of war, apparently, only the imminence of destruction, could put the men and the machines back to work.

You know well enough what I would expect to see if I could go back — how many years hence? The Massachusetts city with clean streets, with modern, sunny factories, with homes that men and women could live and take pride in. The Iowa farms rich not only with corn but also with confident human beings certain of enjoying the fruits of their labor. The Pennsylvania steel mill alive, its workers free from all fear of either the mysterious cycles of unemployment or the power of union-smashing, spy-hiring bosses.

I like America. Our mountains are covered with fog today, but I know they are there. And I know just as certainly that the America I like is a reality. It is there, waiting — for us.

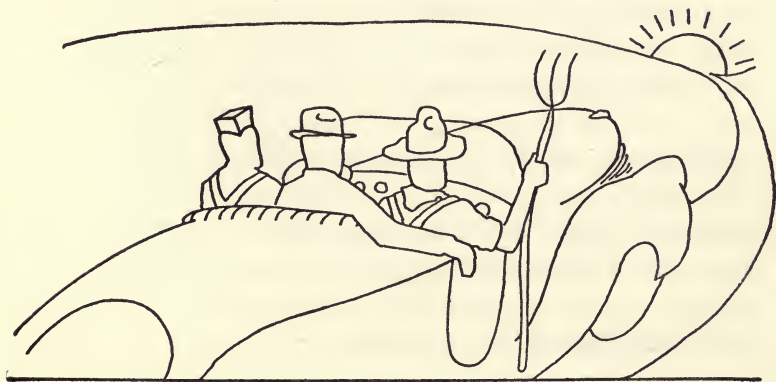
My family has been in this country a long time. I am told that forebears of mine fought in the French and Indian Wars, the American Revolution, and the Civil War.

What interests me most about my ancestors is that they seem to have been pretty average Americans. They weren't statesmen or generals or poets, but just ordinary workmen

and farmers. Of my four great-grandfathers, one was a printer, one a blacksmith, one a hatter, and one a skilled mechanic.

We hear a good deal about the American Dream. For some people it was a dream of enormous wealth, but I doubt if my forefathers had any such ambitions. (I notice that they all sat tight in New England, instead of going out and searching for fame and fortune.) I think they wanted to have enough to eat, to keep out of debt, and to bring up their children decently. Most of the time, as near as I can make out, they had all they could do to make both ends meet. They were respectable, honest, hard-working people, and they fared about as well as such people usually do.

There are many American dreams more splendid than this hope for simple comfort, but none more human or more understandable. Today, for the first time, this dream can be realized — for everyone. We can produce enough food, build enough houses, make enough clothes. We can give people schools and books and radios and movies and automobiles.



What I am contending is, first, that we ought to do it, and, second, that we've got to do it. We ought to do it just out of sheer decency, because we can't stand the idea of millions of people suffering when there is no need for it. We've got to do it because otherwise we'll lose what we have. There is no standing still. Either we break through to a society of planned abundance or we slip back closer and closer to barbarism.

The outward mark of that barbarism is Fascism, with its denial of civil liberties, its intensification of every form of exploitation, its rousing of race prejudices, its attack on culture and science, its glorification of war. But Fascism is only a symptom. Realistic economists are warning us that capitalism has reached its limits. One student even tells us that larger and larger masses, given only enough to subsist on, must toil at useless public works, as the Egyptian masses toiled under the Pharaohs to build the pyramids. Why not? Productive capacity rises and the ability to consume goes down. We can do nothing with the surplus millions except keep them alive and let them work at tasks that will not increase the glut of consumers' goods. Fascism is simply the instrument by which this retrogression is accomplished.

It is an ironic prospect. We thought we were approaching the era of plenty and it turns out to be the new age of darkness.

Ridiculous! We are not to be so easily defeated. There may be a struggle, but we are not afraid of that. We have struggled before, and, once we see that the greatest decision in human history has to be made by us, we will not hesitate to struggle again.

Believing that, I like America.



## Epilogue: For My Daughter

YOU ARE an American. Your parents were born in America, your four grandparents, your eight great-grandparents, your sixteen great-great-grandparents. As for the one thousand and twelve great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandparents that must have existed in the middle of the seventeenth century, the dozen or so whose names we know were also born in America. Probably many of the others were too, but nobody has ever bothered to find out about them. The names of your ancestors — Hicks, Dyer, Horne, Harmon, Libby, Weston, Hill, Haskell, Nelson, Hopkinson — suggest that most of the different stocks originated in the British Isles.

I don't need to tell you that you are not a better American because a certain number of your forefathers settled here in the early sixteen-hundreds. I am glad that one of your best friends is the daughter of a Russian Jew who can remember the 1905 revolution, that another is of pure German stock, and that a third has a German father, an Austrian mother, and a Hungarian grandmother.

You know that these girls are good Americans. Their fathers or their grandfathers came to this country just as your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfathers did, and for the same reasons. We are all intruders. Some

came early and some late. But, early or late, these immigrants came here because they believed that America offered them more than Europe did, more of material goods and perhaps also more of freedom and dignity. And, early or late, each new arrival contributed all the strength and skill that the Old World had given him to the building of the New World.

We are all Americans, and we have a right to be proud of that fact. Our pride, however, ought not to include hatred or contempt for other peoples. I am glad you have known German and Italian boys and girls, and I wish you had known Japanese children as well. You have heard Germany, Italy, and Japan spoken of in this house with some harshness, but I think you know that we mean the rulers of those countries, not the men and women and children who live there. One of your playmates has as much dislike for Hitler as you and I have, but she loves her cousins and her uncles and aunts, who live in Germany.

You will meet people who say such things as: "This is God's country," or, "The United States is the greatest nation in the world," or, "One American can lick twenty foreigners." You will meet people who talk about Kikes and Wops and Hunkies. These people will call themselves patriots. But do not let them make you think that patriotism is a bad thing. Their narrow-mindedness is not patriotism.

You have already learned from reading, as I hope some day you will learn from travel, that people of other nations have different customs from ours. Sometimes they are better, sometimes worse, but mostly just different. You may have noticed that there are some boys and girls who think that

everything they have or do is perfect just because they have or do it. There are adults like that. Then some boys and girls always seem dissatisfied with what they have and think other people's things are necessarily better. There are adults like that, too.

Both attitudes are a little foolish. We are where we are, and we have what we have. What I have tried to show in this book is that we have a good deal. There are opportunities enough here, and responsibilities as well. You can say, with no sense of hostility toward other lands, that you were born in a good country. You are learning the history of that country, and you are finding that, though there have been some discreditable episodes, our record is on the whole a good one. You are studying American geography, and you know that this is a broad land and a rich one and a powerful one. You are picking up the traditions of America, at home and at school, and, though they are not better than those of other nations, they are your traditions.

America is our job. We may feel that we were lucky in being born here, but certainly we can't claim any credit for it. We can only accept with gratitude the America that has been given us. Our responsibility is toward the future.

What I have tried to say in this book is that, being Americans, we have to see the whole of America and see it as it really is. And that means that we must look at a great many things that we will not like. The President has said that one-third of the American people do not have proper houses or proper clothes or proper food. The book shows that this is true, and tries to tell why it is true.

It also says that it needn't be true, that everybody could

have a decent house, warm clothing, and plenty to eat. It isn't as if America were a poor nation. It is a rich nation, and it can take care of the needs of all its people.

You will say, of course, "If this is so, why don't we do something about it?"

The first reason is that a great many people don't realize that there is something that needs to be done. Somehow we human beings find it easy to believe what we want to believe. Most people know how much misery there is in America, but they don't feel it. It doesn't mean anything to them.

You would be more upset if a playmate of yours was run over by an automobile than you are when you hear on the radio that a dozen children have been killed by bombs in Spain. That is natural, and in a way, since we can't be upset all the time, it's all right — so long as your mind doesn't fool you into thinking that those Spanish children really never died at all and in any case nobody minded much. You have to remember that those children were just as dear to their parents as you are to your mother and father, and their playmates were just as fond of them as you are of the little girls you play with.

It is the same way with suffering in this country. If we burst into tears every time an American child died unnecessarily, we should be crying most of the time, and we wouldn't get much done. But those deaths are real deaths, every one of them a tragedy. Just because we cannot allow ourselves to weep over them is no reason for forgetting they exist. And it is certainly no reason for not trying to prevent such tragedies — if we can.

The first reason, then, why books like this have to be written



is to remind people of what America is really like. The second reason is to convince them that change is possible.

America today resembles a situation in a fairy story. The honest miller's son is standing by the edge of a well, and there is a rope in his hand with a pail on the end of it, but a spell has been cast upon him, and he is dying of thirst. Not because there isn't water; not because he hasn't the proper utensils to get the water with; not because he lacks the strength to pull up the pail. Just because a witch has got in some of her dirty work.

We won't, of course, give everybody enough to eat just by mumbling a few magical words to break the spell, but it's almost as simple as that. The marvelous thing is that it can be done. The silly thing is that we don't do it.

I have, as you know, my own ideas and my own way of working for an America in which there will be no poverty. When I told you that I had lost my job at Rensselaer, you cried. I knew why. We had wanted you to understand what kind of world you were growing up in, and we had told you about poverty and unemployment. You thought we would all be begging for food in a breadline. And, though there haven't been any breadlines for us yet, there might be some day — a fact that it is necessary for you to realize, even though you had a bad half hour that evening.

I said, "Do you know why I was fired?"

You answered, "Because you're a Communist."

A little ruthlessly I went on: "What is a Communist?"

Through tears you answered, "He wants all the poor people to be helped."

For a not quite eight-year-old it was a good enough answer.

And it is the fact, above all others, that I want you to remember. That is the end that all of us work for. You may decide, as you grow up, that there are better ways than ours of abolishing poverty, but I hope you will not forget that that is what we want, and I hope you will want it too.

I said, "Are you glad I'm a Communist?"

And you, still crying a little, still seeing the horrors of poverty before us, said, "Yes."

That spirit is the thing that counts. You will be told, as everybody is told many times in the course of his education, that you and those of your age are the hope of the world. And it's true. Some time there will be a generation with both the opportunity and the will, and the better world we hope for will be created.

Yours might well be that generation. You may see the American dream come true. You may be one of those who help realize it. That at least is something to work for, and I can imagine no finer way of showing your love for America.





